

Theological Education

Volume 46, Number 1
2010

ISSUE FOCUS

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The Association of Theological Schools
The Commission on Accrediting

ISSN 0040-5620

Theological Education
is published semiannually by
The Association of Theological Schools
IN THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA
10 Summit Park Drive
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15275-1110

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This journal is indexed in the ATLA Religion Database® and is available in electronic form in ATLASerials® (ATLAS®), both produced by the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606; Email: atla@atla.com; Website: <http://www.atla.com>.

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Editor's Introduction	iii
<i>Stephen R. Graham</i>	

ISSUE FOCUS

The Status of Theological Research

Crafting Research in the Service of Theological Education	1
<i>Joel B. Green</i>	
"Doers of the Word": Research and Teaching in Theology.	15
<i>Brian E. Daley, SJ</i>	
Crafting Research that Contributes to Theological Education	27
<i>Emilie M. Townes</i>	
History, Seminary, and Vocation.	43
<i>E. Brooks Holifield</i>	
The Mystery of Meaning	55
<i>Kathleen O'Connor</i>	

OPEN FORUM

Honoring the Body: Nurturing Wellness through Seminary Curriculum and Community Life	67
<i>Mary Chase-Ziolek</i>	
Faculty Vocation and Governance within a Consortium of Denominationally Accountable Seminaries.	79
<i>Larry Perkins</i>	
Seminaries, Congregations, and Clergy: Lifelong Partners in Theological Education	87
<i>C. Franklin Granger</i>	

Continuing the Conversation

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

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Editor's Introduction

Stephen R. Graham

In recent years many have expressed the concern that theological school faculties were falling behind those in college and university departments of religion in scholarship and publishing. In a 2005 study by the Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education, a panel of theological school leaders noted that “the influence of ‘theological’ faculty in shaping the disciplines of theological and religious scholarship has declined, as faculty in the field of ‘religion’ have become more numerous and prominent.”¹ Part of the concern was that those in departments of religious studies were less inclined to use their scholarship to address issues and needs of the church. While the agenda of theological research remains a concern and faculty in theological schools have many (and increasing!) demands on their time, the balance appears to be shifting.

The same study found that current faculty published more than their counterparts had a decade earlier and noted that rising rates of scholarly publishing are “a welcome development.” The study’s authors believed that more publishing by theological faculty would help to right the balance and that the research would have a positive impact on the quality of teaching as well.²

Over the past decade and a half, in order to strengthen the scholarship produced by theological school faculty members, The Association of Theological Schools has awarded more than 230 grants for research by faculty at member schools through the Henry Luce III Fellows in Theology program and the Lilly Theological Research Grants program. An important part of the Lilly grants program is the annual conference, which gathers grant recipients to discuss their work and also to hear from senior scholars about the vocation of scholarship while serving in theological schools. A highlight each year is a keynote address from a senior scholar about the craft of theological education. Deeply appreciated by those who attended the conferences, three of those addresses have been included in this issue of *Theological Education* to share with a broader audience. Emilie Townes, associate dean of Yale University Divinity School and speaker at the 2007 Lilly conference, insists that theological research, rather than being primarily an individual intellectual quest, must be communal, interdisciplinary, and tethered to the traditions of real people. Brian Daley of the University of Notre Dame, who addressed the conference in 2009, observes that loving the “business” of studying, with its attendant tasks of research and writing, is essential for the vocation of the theological educator. He compares the craft of theological research to watchmaking, “an intricate, time-consuming, complex project of assembling little pieces carefully, building them meticulously into a functioning whole.”³ A conference speaker in 2010, Joel Green, from Fuller Theological Seminary, argues that theology is central to Christian witness. It is not simply words or ideas but rather something we do to help faith find understanding. Theological research helps keep the Church’s faith alive and life-giving in contemporary culture.

A feature of the ATS work in faculty development in recent years has been to host a presentation and reception at the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature. Two of those presentations are presented here. In 2009, E. Brooks Holifield from Candler School of Theology of Emory University presented his essay "History, Seminary, and Vocation." As a historian, he traces the development of the discipline of the history of Christianity in seminary curricula and argues for the importance of both distance and appreciation in the transmission of tradition. Holifield also notes the importance of both in-depth particular studies of specialized narrow topics and broader studies that speak to the interests of pastors, laity, and general readers. A speaker the following year, Kathleen O'Connor of Columbia Theological Seminary tells of her thirty-five years of theological teaching and what she has learned about loving biblical texts and searching them for the mystery of meaning that reflects the mystery of the human relationship with the Divine. O'Connor notes how her experience, like that of many veteran theological educators, has been enriched over the years by what she has learned from her students and the wisdom of her colleagues across the disciplines.

Three articles that address varied topics of interest round out this issue: Mary Chase-Ziolek, from North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago, draws on her training in health sciences and theology to address the important topic of wellness in seminary life. Both in curriculum and community life, she argues, the body should be honored and cared for, in sharp contrast to normal patterns of those in education and ministry who frequently neglect the body through overwork or unhealthy practices. Larry Perkins of Northwest Baptist Seminary expands coverage related to the vocation of faculty and issues of governance (see *Theological Education* 44, no. 2), to include his reflections on those topics from the distinctive perspective of a consortium of denominationally accountable seminaries that are connected to a university. Finally, noting the challenges, changes, and creative developments in clergy education that have appeared over the past two decades, pastor C. Franklin Granger of First Baptist Church, Athens, Georgia, offers reflections on the innovative residential education for seminary graduates through the Transitions into Ministry program funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. Building on that pattern, he proposes a "Congregational Engagement" model that emphasizes formalized collaboration between theological schools and congregations. This model, Granger argues, would not only enhance preparation of students for ministry but would also facilitate continuing education toward the lifelong learning ideal to which theological schools aspire.

We hope that this issue of *Theological Education* will be an encouragement to scholars, teachers, and all those who contribute to the work of theological schools.

ENDNOTES

1. Barbara G. Wheeler, Sharon L. Miller, and Katarina Schuth, *Signs of the Times: Present and Future Theological Faculty*, Auburn Studies, no. 10, (New York: Auburn Theological Seminary, February 2005), 18–19.
2. Ibid. *Theological Education* 40, no. 2 (2005) reported on the May 2003 ATS Luce Consultation on Theological Scholarship. The article is available on the ATS website at www.ats.edu > Resources > Publications > Index and Archives to Theological Education.
3. Brian E. Daley, “Doers of the Word”: Research and Teaching in Theology,” *Theological Education* 46, no. 1 (2010): 22.

Crafting Research in the Service of Theological Education

Joel B. Green

Fuller Theological Seminary

ABSTRACT: Research in the service of theological education requires navigating among sometimes competing expectations. Navigation is helped by a keen sense of vocation and context, by critical reflection on the nature of scholarship itself, and by shaping faculty review policies accordingly.

My assignment is to provide some personal reflections on a topic that is central to our vocation as theological faculty.¹ By most accounts, some 20 percent of our time has been designated for research, writing, and publication.² That's the theory anyway, though many of us find the work of research and writing squeezed by the ever-present—and in these economically depressed days, increasing—demands of teaching and faculty administration. To my way of thinking, these competing demands on our time underscore the importance of hard-nosed reflection on what we mean by theological research.

Given the personal nature of these reflections, let me introduce two caveats before proceeding to an exercise that will introduce three theses. As requested, I will close this presentation with a few compass points—slogans, really—that have shaped my own practices and commitments.

Two caveats

Inevitably, how we think about crafting research in the service of theological education will be shaped by our respective contexts. What I have to say grows out of my educational background and my experience as a faculty member in four different institutional settings. Let me rehearse briefly, then, the contexts within which I have been formed.

Caveat 1: My background

The long and the short of it is that my postsecondary education was entirely in university contexts, but my professional life has been centered in self-standing graduate schools of theology and in seminaries. I completed my first theological degree at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, and earned the PhD from the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. A few years ago, I enrolled at the College of Medicine at the University of Kentucky for graduate work in the neurosciences.

My first faculty appointment was to a small graduate school of Christian studies for the whole people of God, New College Berkeley. Those early years were particularly formative for me, since our educational context and philosophy orbited around theological integration and interdisciplinarity. From there, I moved only a few feet—literally, from room 406 to room 306 in Hobart

Hall—to take a faculty position at the American Baptist Seminary of the West (ABSW) and Graduate Theological Union (GTU). This again was a formative period for my teaching and research—first, because of the multiracial profile of the ABSW student body and faculty; second, because of the theological and religious diversity represented by the GTU; and third, because of the opportunity to be involved not only in a more typical seminary curriculum but also with ThD and PhD students. In fact, at the time, the GTU enrolled some 500 doctoral students, and I was happily involved with classes and research supervision with students in biblical studies and in interdisciplinary studies. My MDiv classes enrolled Lutherans and Presbyterians and Unitarians, Jesuits and Franciscans and Dominicans, Congregationalists and Baptists and Methodists, as well as students from the Center for Jewish Studies and the Institute of Buddhist Studies. Cross-talk—whether we think of cross-disciplinary conversation or bridging diverse cultural, theological, and religious commitments—was simply part of daily life. Add to this the towering presence of the University of California at Berkeley and the range of social and political issues integral to what it means to keep your eyes open in a place like Berkeley, and you can see why this would have been such a stimulating place.

Although I had imagined that we were in Berkeley for the long haul, our family moved in 1997 to a very different context, in a move to which we sometimes referred as our “invitation to cultural whiplash,” to Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. Asbury Seminary is a large school, which enrolled some 1,700 students at the time, with a student body and faculty very different from what I had experienced in Berkeley. This was true both in terms of ethnicity (predominately Caucasian) and in terms of theological tradition (predominately Wesleyan and Methodist). Just over a year-and-a-half ago, I took a teaching position at Fuller Theological Seminary—a large, urban, intercultural, multidenominational seminary, located in the Los Angeles area, far from the horse farms of central Kentucky.

Each of these institutions provided different contexts for teaching and scholarship, but they dealt with issues of research and publication in similar ways—ways, that is, that are probably more typical of self-standing seminaries than might be the case with university-related divinity schools. As will become more clear in what follows, this is important for my understanding of what it might mean to craft research in the service of theological education.

One more bit of background: I became a dean at the age of twenty-nine and have served in some sort of capacity as an academic administrator throughout much of my faculty career thus far. This is important in the current discussion for a couple of reasons. First, as a dean, I believed that we could actually change the world of theological education. I acted as though it were possible to revise what we mean by *scholarship* and to think creatively about what we mean by *publications*. If it became clear that our standards for tenure and promotion were working at counterpurposes to our commitments to theological education, then we could reshape the way things get done. Second, as a dean and provost, I refused to give up teaching, research, and writing, and have continued to publish throughout the whole of my career as an academic administrator. This means that, despite my crossing over to the other side from

time to time (that is, to the side of administration), I continued to reflect on research and publication as one who was working to contribute substantively to the seminary as a faculty member.

Caveat 2: Agenda-setting

There is another overarching issue that influences whatever I want to say on this topic. I acknowledge that those of us involved in theological education serve multiple constituencies and have a range of often-competing expectations related to our theological research or theological writing. A worthy question to keep before us as we think about these things is this: Whose passions are in focus?

The truth is that faculty often experience tensions between our sense of vocation and the job search, or between our sense of vocation and the collective sense of the tenure and promotion (or faculty development) committees of our institutions. This is simply part of our reality.

Sometimes, though, it is a strange reality. It can be strange, for example, due to opposing assumptions about the mission of the institution. To cite one case, our mission at Asbury Seminary was to send forth a well-trained, sanctified, Spirit-filled, evangelistic ministry to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land. One might argue that this makes sense of a decidedly Wesleyan seminary. One might also query how theological research might fit within an institutional mission articulated in just this way. We might put forward all sorts of practices by which we could cultivate the desired dispositions among our students, but it might not be immediately self-evident how an institution with this mission statement would authorize an emphasis on theological research. What we did, of course, was to take that little phrase, “well-trained,” and open it up with talk about the importance of the discipleship of the mind. I should admit that questions about research and writing were voiced differently, even along competing lines, by different stakeholders at Asbury Seminary. At the same time, I doubt that this is the only school in the ATS membership for which the institutional mission doesn’t do much to clarify the role or status of theological research within that institution’s overall aims.

With regard to agenda-setting, my sense is that theological faculty struggle more with the reality that *my* research agenda is not always *theirs*. What *I* want to do isn’t always what *they* want me to do. Moreover, the *they* with competing expectations have different profiles for different members of our faculties.

For example, we recruited a well-known Latina to teach theology. As she and I began what would become an ongoing conversation about her development as a faculty member, it became immediately clear that she experienced demands on her time and energies that were foreign to me. In fact, I was amazed at how often *they* wanted her to do something. *They* voiced a series of claims on her that I hadn’t heard as a white male academic. Who were *they*? *They* were members of her wider ecclesial community; the Hispanic church needed her as a role model and theological resource in a way that was not true of me and would not be true of the majority of our faculty. I often found the same to be true with my African American colleagues, for example, and

with my female colleagues; they sometimes experienced pressure to serve in ecclesial and public roles that often far outstrip the pressures other faculty experienced. This raises hard questions. One, to which I turn in a moment, is how to account for those extraordinary demands when contemplating issues of faculty development, including structures related to faculty review. More immediately, these pressures and counterpressures raise questions about how to find and keep a balance—how to work out the relationship between my agenda and theirs, how much to allow them to set my agenda.

There are also other *theys*, of course. One of the most hazy sets of expectations come from publishers. Let me put it in these terms: Beware of publishers! They come to town bringing gifts, but inherent to these gifts are expectations of reciprocity that can be enslaving. One of my first colleagues in Berkeley told me that PhD programs are designed to destroy your ego in order to give you an inflated one at the end. The experience of many newly minted PhDs is that those egos are not reinflated so quickly! So when a publisher shows up looking for a book, well, it's hard to believe. Someone thinks I have something worthwhile to say? And so you sign a contract. And suddenly, you are in debt. You owe them. Hopefully, the scholar they want and the scholar you want to be are the same person, working on the same research interests. And I should say that my own experience of publishers has taken the form of a symbiotic relationship: they need me, I need them, and we help each other. This has been true, well, most of the time. But there are also editors who call with opportunities that seem good at the time, but that quickly add up, and suddenly we find ourselves toiling on someone else's agenda rather than our own.

An exercise

Now, the exercise: Take a piece of paper and draw three circles. You will have to decide how you want to locate them on the page, whether there are three separate circles, overlapping circles, concentric circles, circles in a hierarchy, and so on. Name them: the academy, the seminary, and the church. Configure the relationships among these three however you want. Now locate yourself on the page and draw an arrow indicating the direction of the influence you want to have. Where are you in relation to the academy, the seminary, and the church? Who are you trying to influence?

Some will locate themselves in the seminary, hoping to influence the church. Some will see the seminary in relation to the academy. Others will locate themselves in the church trying to influence the academy. Others will have drawn a jumble of arrows. Still others will refuse this exercise and remap their worlds in ways I had not anticipated.

However those maps were drawn, even if my categories were resisted, this exercise is an important one. How we map our worlds is important. How we locate seminary, church, and academy in relation to each other makes a difference in how we visualize the nature of theological research. The same is true for how we locate ourselves in relation to all three. Mapping is a way of making transparent the social construction of relationships that put on display how we think, believe, feel, and behave—in this case about theological research.

When I ask the influence question, one answer I hear repeatedly from faculty members is that they want to bring the fruits of scholarship to the church. I remember thinking this way when I first got out of my own doctoral work, and even doing some writing in order to accomplish this agenda. But then I read an interesting book on biblical interpretation, cleverly titled *Biblical Interpretation*.³ Early on, Robert Morgan and John Barton pointed out that one of the reasons the academy and the church are not on the same page with regard to the Bible is that they have different aims that only rarely overlap. They observed that the academy has tended to focus especially on the biblical materials insofar as they give us access to historical data related to the exercise of ancient religion, whereas Jewish and Christian faith communities tend to read the Bible in relationship to the cultivation and sustenance of their faith. In the modern era, these two perspectives have generally been kept separate, with the result that our ambitions about “bringing the academy to the church” typically result in a conversation that is terribly one-sided. In this model, the aims, protocols, and questions of the academy are foisted on the unsuspecting church.

Some questions easily present themselves. To what degree do the critical tools and perspectives honed in the academy actually serve the church? To what degree do they even take the church seriously? In reality, I find often enough that some so-called theological scholarship actually positions itself against the church; it works under the assumption that the church is the problem that needs to be fixed instead of recognizing that the church, historical and global, comprises the tradition and arena from which theological scholarship derives its significance.

Here is another question: Why *should* the academy set the agenda? Why, for example, is the academy not the research and development arm of the church, so to speak? Why are the issues that the church surfaces not important and significant for the academy? Of course, sometimes they are. But this only reveals the problem I am hoping to identify—namely, how often theological faculty think in terms of bringing scholarship *to the church*. According to this “map” of institutional relations, scholarship is something outside the church. Scholarship is something that one performs over here, in the academy, and then one builds a bridge to over there, in the church. You will not be surprised to hear, then, that I am especially drawn to those diagrams constructed of concentric circles, diagrams that suggest that there is no “bridging” going on, but which suggest rather the notion that theological scholarship in the service of theological education is grounded in one’s ecclesial and theological place.

Is it scholarship? Three theses

If we think in these terms, though, we face a hard question: If we practice theological scholarship grounded in our theological and ecclesial place, are we really scholars? If we take the church seriously, if we take the *theological* in theological scholarship seriously, are we really scholars? Who are the *real* scholars? It is no surprise to my audience, I think, that *scholars* often gets defined in ways that exclude the kinds of concerns I have begun to introduce. And this leads to my constructive comments about the nature of scholarship in the service of theological education.

Thesis 1: Crossing disciplinary lines

Part of what is involved in crafting scholarship that will contribute to theological education is that we must think in more expansive ways than our disciplinary homes have often trained us to think.

I refer here to the first of a series of conversions I experienced in the early days of my teaching career at New College Berkeley. I came to a moment of crisis during the few weeks between finishing my dissertation and entering the classroom to teach. I had been assigned two courses, two courses that would be enrolled in by people who would not be spending their lives parsing verbs or reading critical commentaries—engineers at Hewlett Packard, nurses and doctors at San Francisco General, lawyers, account managers, and the like. They were highly educated people, though their advanced degrees and experience were in areas other than theology. Engaging in hours of lectures on the Synoptic problem didn't seem to be the best use of our time. I began to wonder how one might engage people theologically and biblically who didn't "need it," people who were uninterested in denominational requirements for ordination, people for whom theological education was about faithful discipleship in their worlds of service. That represented the constellation of fresh questions that began to press on me. Being in Berkeley during those formative years was wonderful. Here was an arena for those kinds of seminal conversations, where engaging in integrative work was almost second nature.

Other illustrations come to mind. My mother has been teaching the same Sunday school class at her church in West Texas for some forty years. If I were to ask her, "Mom, did you know that biblical studies and theology are different things?" she would wonder what went wrong with (my) theological education. If I were to tell her that biblical studies and ethics were two different things, she would have no idea what I was talking about.

What is it about our disciplinary homes that allows us to think that we can keep separate Scripture and ethics, or history and preaching? How did we learn that it is okay for a biblical scholar to talk about what God used to say, but only theologians and homiletics can talk about what God is now saying? What legitimates this way of thinking for us, so that we simply take it for granted and allow theological scholarship to be determined by it?

One more illustration: As a member of the panel reviewing applications for Lilly Faculty Fellowships, I finished last week reading all of the theological research proposals on the docket for this weekend. We have a number of very good proposals to consider. I have to say, though, that some individual proposals would never even have been considered except for letters of reference that suggested how they might be helpful to theological education. This is because the proposers could not, or did not, make the cases themselves. The bottom line is that most of us aren't used to talking to one another. The bottom line is that, when we do sit with a community of our peers—not just missiologists, not just reformationists, not just youth-and-family specialists, but with the entire theological curricula at the table—it can be hard to have a conversation.

Part of what is involved in crafting scholarship that will contribute to theological education is that we must think in more expansive ways than our disciplinary homes have often trained us to think. The truth, though, is that

this is a risky business, this first thesis, because it challenges the accredited standards of our respective disciplines. She isn't *really* doing ethics, because she is reading psychology. He isn't *really* doing New Testament studies, because he is reading Calvin, or Wittgenstein. How our discipline has been defined becomes the issue, and make no mistake, this is a politicized business—a risky, politicized business.

Maybe we have to reconfigure the canons by which we measure excellence if we are going to engage in this kind of scholarship. It is hard enough to cross boundaries when it comes to putting in a cross-disciplinary course at our schools: What do you mean you want to teach a class with both New Testament and Christian Ethics nomenclature? The computer can't handle that! Never mind the registrar, what about crossing boundaries closely guarded by one's colleagues? Your PhD is in ethics; what makes you think you have anything to say about pastoral counseling?

One of my particular interests has been in how biblical scholarship, and even the Bible itself, has been segregated from the theological enterprise. The chasm is easy to spot in claims by biblical scholars that theologians neglect the Bible altogether, collect biblical prooftexts as though they were prize seashells on a public seashore, fail to account for "the context" of a biblical passage, or talk about the Bible without apparently reading it closely; or in claims by theologians that biblical scholars continue to say more and more about less and less, substitute superficial "application" for theological rigor, ignore the theological ramifications of their exegetical judgments, or, with their heightened interest in the historical particularity of biblical texts, effectively remove the Bible from those who might have turned to it as a source or norm for the theological enterprise. It seems to me that our training and socialization into disciplinary homes has not served well the shape and future of theological inquiry and theological education.

That raises for me a further question: Who is it all for?

I remember when I was elected to the governing council of the Society for Biblical Literature (SBL) and discovered in our first meeting that we would be talking about the strategic mission and vision of the Society. I thought to myself, "*Another* vision statement? *Another* mission statement? *Another* strategic plan?" But there it was: our mission in the SBL was to "foster biblical scholarship," and we needed to discuss what this might entail. I had also become a member of the AAAS, the American Association for the Advancement of Science. At the time and to this day, every week I would get a mailing from the AAAS announcing something like this: "Save the world! Join the AAAS!" I was thinking, *JBL* never does that; *Journal of Biblical Literature* never says, "Save the world! Join the SBL!" This prompted me to ask my colleagues on the SBL Council, "Who is this for, this fostering of biblical scholarship? Who is it for?"

We had a lengthy conversation and decided that fostering biblical scholarship was for our colleagues in the profession, to be sure, but also for other publics. As a result, we added this statement to our "strategic vision": "Develop resources for diverse audiences, including students, religious communities and the general public."⁴ Almost immediately our programmatic emphases began to broaden. For example, the Society began engaging in work related

to what it means to teach the Bible in public schools. An e-newsletter was developed for high school teachers of the Bible: *Teaching the Bible*.⁵ And the SBL has undertaken programs related to the Bible and the parish, as well as an NEH-sponsored website called “The World of the Bible: People, Places, and Passages,” aimed at the larger public interest for things biblical.⁶

What, or who, is our scholarship for? Let me push further. Following conventional wisdom, we might be justified in saying that our scholarship serves the book-buying public. It is for them that we do our research. We might imagine that we devote those countless hours to dusty volumes or human subject review committees so that people will acquire our books, read them and change their minds, and even undergo theological (trans)formation. If this is the direction of our thinking, then we might do well to consider a document published last year titled “The Ten Awful Truths about Book Publishing.”⁷ Let me summarize these awful truths by referring to only five of them:

- In 2008, more than 560,000 new books were published in the United States—more than double the number of new books published only five years earlier. In the UK there were almost 120,000 new books published. In the Anglo-American world, then, 680,000 new books were published in a single year.
- Book sales are declining. The digital revolution may be expanding the number of books and products available, but the number of actual book sales is not keeping pace.
- This means that, in 2004, of the 1.2 million books that are tracked, 950,000 of those books sold 99 copies or fewer. Another 200,000 sold fewer than 1,000 copies.
- A book has less than a 1 percent chance of being stocked in an average bookstore.
- Today, most books are sold *only* to an author’s or a publisher’s “community.” The corollary: most book marketing today is done by authors and not by publishers.

If we are putting our research eggs into a book-publishing basket, we might want to reconsider. The picture is not a sanguine one.

What if we thought about different kinds of end-users for our research? When I was preparing to relocate to Scotland for postgraduate research, some friends raised some scholarship funds. They visited various places where I had been involved in pastoral ministry, and there they would make the case that I was a good investment. Here’s the kind of thing they would say, by the numbers:

PhD graduate: 1

Number of years teaching at the seminary level: 30

Number of new students each year: 50

Number of congregations served in a pastor’s lifetime: 5

Average congregation size: 150

Number of congregants potentially influenced by one PhD graduate:
1,125,000

I have the capacity, apparently, to influence in some way 1.125 million congregants. And that's with what for some of us would be relatively conservative numbers: fifty new students, five congregations, and so on. (That's not even to mention the potential influence I have if I am involved in the preparation of future faculty members.) Here's a corroborating perspective: The Overseas Council is concerned with equipping indigenous leadership for the church across the globe; some years ago, they determined that this would entail the preparation of one PhD for every one million people. This suggests the potential influence of a theological scholar.

This puts our research in an interesting light. I can hope that my book sells ninety-nine copies this year, or I can influence 1.125 million congregants over the lifetime of my work. You will notice that I have not stopped publishing books, so you shouldn't be overly provoked by this either-or way of putting things. Of course, I am not suggesting that we put an end to the writing, publishing, and reading of books. However, I do think these sorts of considerations could make a difference in how we understand the effect of our research.

Thesis 2: Expanding our influence

We must think differently about the end-users of our research; that is, we must think more seriously about the researcher's community of influence.

Instead of focusing on "publishing or perishing," we might start thinking about the classroom itself as the impetus for our research. When I was a dean concerned with faculty development I would sometimes say to one of my faculty colleagues, "I'm not after your engaging in research simply so that you can get a book published; I want your research to enliven the classroom. I want you to be excited; I want you to be passionate when you teach, and you can be more passionate about your research than about someone else's!"

What are our circles of influence? These would include, of course, our classrooms and religious communities. Were we to take these wider circles seriously, might we consider such web-based resources, including YouTube and iTunes, as ways of disseminating our research? The idea would not be to dismiss our interest in book publishers and other print media but to widen the potential effect of our work.

What if we leveraged our research in a way that took seriously these communities of influence? Would we report, "I did this research and wrote a book"? Or would we report, "I did this research and changed my thinking on this, which changed the way I engage my students on this, which affected the way I taught about this at these local churches, which changed the way I engaged in this denominational judicatory, which shaped what I did in this conference, which led to the construction of this website . . ."? Well, you can see where this is going. The question becomes one of leveraging. How can I leverage my research for the greatest influence?

The other question, the nagging question, is whether this is scholarship. Is posting something on iTunes scholarship? Is uploading something to YouTube scholarship? Is changing my lectures for a core course scholarship? Does it count, really, when it comes to tenure and promotion?

Thesis 3: Scholarship reconsidered

And this opens the door to my third thesis: We must rehabilitate the language of scholarship so as to take seriously our theological and ecclesial traditions and adapt faculty hiring and review structures accordingly. In other words, we have to become change agents with regard to what counts.

When it comes to review and promotion and salary negotiations, we have to change the way the world works. One has only to look at transformations in the open-access movement to see that change is possible—and, indeed, to see how some changes are already taking place.

The truth is, many of us have already been pushed in this direction, sometimes kicking and screaming, because of the differences between what counts for scholarship in our respective fields. It simply is the case that the levels and variety of opportunities for showcasing scholarship available to me as a New Testament scholar are not the same as the opportunities for someone in Christian education or in sacred music. Given these varieties of opportunity, how scholarship is measured has already become (or should already have become) an issue.

What is scholarship? Three or four years ago, I was involved in putting together a definition, and this is the language we drafted:

Scholarship means engaging in original research as well as stepping back from one's investigation in order to look for connections, build bridges, and communicate one's work effectively.

Accordingly, the term *scholarship* recognizes discovery, integration, application, and teaching as separate but overlapping dimensions. You may recognize that, with this definition, we were borrowing from Ernest L. Boyer's book, *Scholarship Reconsidered*, and especially from the conversation about assessing faculty scholarship that Boyer's work stimulated.⁸ We defined an activity as *scholarly* if it met certain criteria:

- if it requires disciplinary expertise;
- if it is performed in a manner characterized by clear goals, adequate preparation, and appropriate methodology;
- if its results are appropriately documented and disseminated; and
- if its significance extends beyond the context of the individual but somehow contributes to the field of inquiry and is subjected to peer evaluation.

This includes books, but not only books. In fact, all kinds of cultural products can arise out of that way of thinking about scholarship.

Reflecting on the nature of scholarship in the service of theological education, I have suggested that we need to think in more expansive ways than our disciplinary homes have often trained us to think, that we must take more seriously the researcher's community(ies) of influence, and that we must rehabilitate the language of scholarship so as to take seriously our theological and ecclesial traditions and adapt faculty, hiring, and review structures according-

ly. In doing so, I have made no attempt to exclude other interests from being labeled *scholarly*. Nor have I sketched these theses under the naïve assumption that institutionalizing changes of this kind would be simple. For many of us, and for many of our institutions, the currents are deep and fast-moving, and they take us in directions other than these. Whether we have the theological vision and political will to carry us forward is an unanswered question.

Compass points

Finally, I have been asked to speak autobiographically about my own practices of research, writing, and publishing. Although the whole of this presentation evidences signs of my formation and the commitments developed in various institutional settings, these last compass points are even more personal. Undoubtedly, others will want to add to this short list of commitments and practices.

A commitment to collaboration

One of the identifying marks of much of my research and publishing activity has been a pronounced emphasis on collaboration. Without collaboration, the sort of integration and interdisciplinarity to which I have referred is difficult to realize.

Some collaboration has involved actual face-to-face work in groups. Sometimes it has involved bringing disparate perspectives together as an editor. Sometimes it has involved ongoing conversations and writing with people in other fields, leading to coauthored books and articles. In fact, I went back to school a few years ago to do graduate work in neuroscience because of a series of formal conversations in working groups and conferences often populated by a range of scholars representing a range of specializations within the neurosciences, but, typically, only by one theologian, one philosopher, and one biblical scholar, myself. These experiences pushed me to want to know better, from the inside, what was going on with the in-house talk among those neuroscientists.

Collaboration has been important to my research and writing, but I find that it is not always valued. It is often talked about, but it is not often honored. I have at home in a file folder a signed contract from a university press to do a book on “the new historicism” and New Testament studies. I was to have co-authored that book with an English professor at the University of California, Berkeley. We signed that contract in 1988, back when people actually thought about “the new historicism,” but this book was never written. My coauthor’s department chair informed her that getting involved in this project would become an obstacle to her getting tenure. “We don’t like coauthored books. We can’t tell where one contribution ends and another begins. We don’t know to whom we should give credit for what.” What an interesting response for an institution that has traditionally thought of itself as being on the cutting-edge, where one might think community and collaboration, integration and interdisciplinarity would be prized. It is true, though, that collaboration and interdisciplinarity are hard to document and evaluate under the dated rubrics

of tenure and promotion procedures. The question is whether collaboration itself could come to be valued.

Practicing stewardship

Another aspect of my research-and-writing practices finds a home at the interface of stewardship and innovation. Scholarship is often measured in terms of innovation: What substantive contribution does this make to the field? Additionally, though, there is the question of dissemination, including dissemination to multiple publics, which I tend to think of in terms of stewardship—leveraging the time and energy of critical reflection and study in ways that have potential for influence among an array of audiences. For example, I was recently asked by a publisher to consider doing a book on God’s *basileia*, that is, God’s kingdom, empire, dominion. This was an attractive idea, but I had some questions about whether this was a commitment I wanted to make. So I wrote an essay for a periodical on recent work on the kingdom of God and New Testament studies—a survey of recent thought, really. Then I was asked by the *Review of Biblical Literature* to review a book on the kingdom of God in Luke–Acts, which I did. I then decided to offer a class on the New Testament and the kingdom of God, taught an adult education class at my home church on the subject, and agreed to write a major article on the “Kingdom of God” for the forthcoming revision of *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. One of these days I might actually write that book. In the interim, I have a deepening and widening path of interest and reflection, allowing for both innovation and stewardship.

Teaching to write

I teach to write; I don’t write to teach. When I was putting the final touches on my *New International Commentary on Luke’s Gospel*, for example, I pointed out in the preface my indebtedness to the churches, workshops, classes, and conferences that provided me with opportunity to engage in conversation about Luke. Here is what I would do: I would lecture and engage in conversation with pen in hand, writing down the questions that people would ask and the insights that would surface. Those were the questions, I thought, that ought to be addressed in a commentary on Luke’s Gospel—in addition to the questions raised by scholars like Schneider, Fitzmyer, Conzelmann, and others, going right back to The Venerable Bede. I thought a commentary ought to include the sorts of concerns raised by people at the turn of the twenty-first century, too. Teaching to write means that such concerns and insights that I garner from interaction with students, as well as the research that goes into preparing for those interactions, become formative for the whole process.

Setting an agenda

Why did I become interested in New Testament ethics? How did I develop a concern for economic and health-related issues in studying Scripture? It is not because I woke up one day and thought, “I think I might be interested in economic and health-related questions.” Rather, it’s because we lived in Berkeley and I worked at a seminary then located near the epicenter of north Alameda County’s homeless population. On the two-mile walk from my

house to my seminary office, and on those regular strolls to Telegraph Avenue for coffee, I had numerous conversations with people who lived on the street, including ongoing conversations with homeless persons of genuine faith and with loving hearts. This raised important questions for me about the tendency of churches or social programs to imagine that they are taking good news *to the poor*, as though “the poor” did not already share in the good news. This resulted in language shifts as I reflected on what it might mean to engage with the poor and raised questions more basically about the nature of poverty. Who are the poor, really? This pushed me into conversations and research related to ethnomedicine and economic anthropology, this changed the way I thought about how to read the Gospels and Acts, and on the process goes.

Sometimes I think of this as a kind of strategic schizophrenia—that even though our research takes seriously the nature and challenges of our disciplines, it is also situated (or can be situated) with feet firmly planted in the everydayness of our lives. Who would have thought that life, including the work of the gospel in church and world, might actually impinge on research?

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to Susan Carlson Wood for her invaluable assistance in preparing this essay for publication.

ENDNOTES

1. This material was originally presented at the Lilly Conference on Theological Research in Pittsburgh, on February 20, 2010. The informal nature of this essay reflects this setting.
2. For example, Michael F. Middaugh, *Understanding Faculty Productivity: Standards and Benchmarks for Colleges and Universities* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 15. My use of this figure rests on the widespread assumption that seminaries ought to track with research institutions of higher learning with regard to expectations on faculty research productivity.
3. Robert Morgan and John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
4. See <http://www.sbl-site.org/aboutus.aspx>.
5. See http://www.sbl-site.org/assets/media/TBv2_i4.htm.
6. See “Society of Biblical Literature Receives NEH Award,” <http://www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?ArticleId=840>.
7. Steve Piersanti, “The Ten Awful Truths about Book Publishing,” <http://www.scribd.com/doc/18073453/Ten-Awful-Truths-About-Book-Publishing-by-Steve-Piersanti-609-Update>.
8. Ernest L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990); Charles E. Glassick, Mary Taylor Huber, and Gene I. Maeroff, *Scholarship Assessed: Evaluation of the Professorate* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997); KerryAnn O’Meara and R. Eugene Rice, *Faculty Priorities Reconsidered: Rewarding Multiple*

Forms of Scholarship (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005); John M. Braxton, William Luckey, and Patricia Helland, *Institutionalizing a Broader View of Scholarship through Boyer's Four Domains*, ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report 29, no. 2 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002); John M. Braxton, ed., *Analyzing Faculty Work and Rewards Using Boyer's Four Domains of Scholarship*, New Directions for Institutional Research, no. 129 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

“Doers of the Word”: Research and Teaching in Theology

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ABSTRACT: Some bright, well-motivated students of theology resist getting involved in the research and publication that are expected today if one is pursuing a career in higher education. This may be part of a reaction against the fashions of presenting one’s knowledge and ideas to the academic “guild”—fashions we learn in graduate school. I suggest that theology is not just words or ideas, but something we do, to help our faith find understanding, and that it is a central part of Christian witness. Theological research, if couched in an appropriate rhetoric, is an indispensable way of keeping the Church’s faith alive and life-giving in contemporary culture.

One of the concerns I often hear expressed by undergraduates or master’s degree students at Notre Dame, where I teach Patristic theology, as well as by many of my younger Jesuit confreres who are thinking about doing doctoral studies and engaging in a long-term ministry of college teaching, is the gnawing question of whether they really want to commit themselves to the research and writing—the “publish or perish” cycle of obligations—that American higher education so famously requires of junior professors. What I hear often runs something like this:

I really love theology as a branch of studies (whether it be biblical studies, some aspect of the history of Christian faith and practice, Christian ethics, systematic theology, or some other subdivision of the theological field). I would love to teach it, especially in an undergraduate, liberal arts college or in a seminary: I’d love to share with the people who come after me what I have learned from my reading and my own professors, what I have received from my community of faith and from the people of faith who have gone ahead of me. I would be excited to help the church of the future find an appropriate, contemporary understanding of the faith we have all received, in so many different ways, from our ancestors.

But I don’t see myself primarily as a publishing scholar; I don’t want to devote a lot of my energies to original research and writing, or (more importantly) to being stressed out by the need to come up to other people’s academic expectations. I don’t want to be perennially bound up in the cycle of competition for tenure and promotion, living up to an institution’s public expectations, marketing my skills, managing appointments, judging my own work and the work of others in the light of the standards of “the guild.”

I want to focus on working with people, not working for prestige.

If these are your misgivings, they are probably good ones to have early in your academic career. And if the work of doing extended research, publishing articles and perhaps a book or two, or serving on committees and going to academic meetings with increasing regularity, doesn't sound (in general, at least) like fun—if you don't see yourself getting excited at times about the little, obscure details of your field of interest, or about trying to help your field of interest grow better known and become better focused on issues that matter—then perhaps graduate study and college or seminary teaching really aren't for you! There's a deep and undeniable difference, after all, between what we do as college undergraduates and what we do in graduate school: the first is for love, in the end; but the second is on the way to becoming business. So if you don't *love the business* of studying, you would probably do better just becoming involved in your field at the undergraduate level and then finding another way of making a living later on.

This difference in tone, in purpose, is really one of the things that the first years of graduate studies are meant to help us discover, often by a form of shock therapy that causes many promising young scholars to turn away. Undoubtedly, too, there are major problems about the culture and practices of graduate studies, and the scholarly life they prepare us for, in America today. We tend to do what we are trained to do, after all, and that usually means we imitate our trainers, in the confidence that they've got it right. Our idea of academic work, at least in the early years of a professional career in higher education, is determined by the work and the style and the goals of the teachers we had in graduate school, who modeled for us what we think of as hard-core academic success, and who have been the judges of our own first attempts to be academics ourselves. And what American graduate schools really train doctoral students to do nowadays is to give twenty-minute papers at conferences—to fit into the guild and to say the kind of thing the guild will think clever and exciting. We learn, this way, not simply academic substance (however we might choose to measure that) but also academic fashion, and the two are often very difficult to tell apart.

This isn't the whole story about graduate education, of course. More and more doctoral programs today seem to be realizing that, in our concern to produce scholars at the forward edge of their fields, we haven't always done a good job preparing doctoral students to be college teachers as well as publishing scholars or communicated to them the joy and the educational urgency of teaching well. A number of places are trying to correct the general overemphasis on fitting into the guild by making training in the skill and art of teaching a central part of doctoral study. At Notre Dame, for instance, each of our doctoral students receiving a stipend in theology is expected to serve as a graduate assistant to one of our faculty members for two years and, in the course of that work, to normally share in that faculty member's obligations of teaching, grading, and meeting with students; in the fifth year of study, as dissertation work (one hopes) is drawing to a close, each of our graduate students also teaches two semester courses solo, with help in preparation and steady

mentoring and evaluation from senior faculty. And when it comes to recommending our students for academic positions, we make it a point to comment on their experience and their success in the classroom.

Still, it seems clear that American university culture—especially the expectations of deans and provosts and university tenure committees—is skewed in favor of people who are successful in getting print on a page—preferably on a page in a prestigious American journal with brand recognition—and who are recognized as rising stars by their peers and their seniors, while it is skewed away from those who are strongly focused on forming students' minds. This bias toward published research seems to be growing in seminaries as well, even though the nature of a seminary as a training ground for ministry probably leads to greater emphasis on a more holistic model of educational success.

One main reason, I think, is our general modern distrust for judgments that seem subjective—judgments on questions like these: Does this person know his or her “stuff”? Is this person a positive influence on students? Does this person show common sense, balance, and a desire for selfless service? We tend to look for standards of evaluation that are quantifiable (e.g., How many pages in print has this person produced?) and that are supported by the prejudices of the academic elite (e.g., Is this book published by a “quality” press?). If our university has ambitions of being ranked in the opinion of “those who know” as near or approaching the quality of the nation’s most prestigious schools, then what we’re really asking is whether this faculty member would have a chance of being hired in one of those institutions. And that means, often enough, has this person published work that faculty in those prestige institutions might be interested to read?

Undoubtedly, the value placed on research and publishing in the theological academy has its positive side as well. I learned this by experience as a beginning faculty member at the Weston Jesuit School of Theology, fresh back from graduate school, in the early 1980s. I had done my doctorate at Oxford, where research is the only requirement and everybody is pretty much on his or her own. At Weston, most of the faculty were around my own age (which meant, since most of us were also Jesuits, being a little older than normal for beginning university teachers); but almost all of us—from the president on down—were very much committed to research and writing. It wasn’t so much an exercise in self-promotion there, as it was something people liked to do and treasured the opportunities to do. Our faculty’s interest in doing research was contagious; everyone was interested in hearing what peers and colleagues were doing. And since our school didn’t have regular summer courses, most of us stayed around simply to use the library and work on research projects, so that lunch in the faculty lounge was usually a kind of informal seminar on this or that colleague’s morning’s work. After a few years, I came to realize that this kind of serious, noncompetitive academic culture is not necessarily the norm but that it was definitely a grace; I came to know, as I had suspected already, that the chance to immerse oneself in a research project—to read and write full time—is really the reward and not the burden of academic life, provided you really enjoy your field. More important, I came to realize that being involved in my own ongoing research, and sharing the results of that research

with colleagues and friends who were genuinely interested in it, made me a more lively and better-informed communicator in the theological classroom. I could speak from my own experience as well as from my old notes.

It is difficult, of course, to create this kind of academic culture from nothing; it calls for confident, self-motivated scholars who enjoy learning from one another, as well as wholesome, stress-free venues where faculty members feel free to express their interests and ideas frankly and can "talk shop" without needing to imitate the latest fashion. Most academic institutions I know struggle to form and maintain such venues. But when that culture is available, my experience suggests that it really enhances the entire academic quality of an institution and benefits teachers and the wider public as much as it does the faculty who shape it.

The reason active participation in research is a healthy practice for theologians, I think, lies in what theology is. My vision of theology, I must confess, is a pretty traditional one: faith seeking understanding; the shared faith and religious commitment of a worshipping community, brought into the light shed by the active, common reasoning of intelligent people who live in the modern world—faith subjected to the questions put to it by contemporary culture. Theology, in this traditional sense, is different from philosophy of religion, which really asks about the conditions of possibility for meaningful religious language and the conditions of certainty for religious convictions; it is also different from religious studies, which attempts to reflect on the faith and behavior of religious people from the distance of cultivated objective detachment. Theology studies the content of faith from the standpoint of the committed believer; it is contextualized in faith and in the life and language of the faith community, even though it subjects that faith to questions that may be put to it by unbelievers, and searches for answers, as far as it can, without prejudging what those answers might be.

St. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, begins his great handbook on Christian theology, the *Summa Theologiae*, with the attempt to characterize this branch of learning as a genuine human "science," whose object is *sacra doctrina*—the "sacred learning" handed on in the believing and worshipping Christian Church. In Aquinas's understanding, theology is a science because it is a body of learning about reality, based on the assumption that "what we call God" is the source of all things that are real, and drawing on what God has revealed to a human community about himself in the Bible and in history; like the natural or mathematical sciences, it is developed into a body of knowledge in a carefully constructed system of explanation, based on principles and causes.¹ For Aquinas, the science of theology is certainly open to the give-and-take of argument, because it deals with the "data" of revelation by reasoning; so it draws on philosophy and on knowledge of the positive content of Christian tradition, not as ultimate criteria to which Biblical revelation must conform but as tools of critical clarification and of integration into the wider treasury of human knowledge. "Since grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it," he observes, "natural reason should minister to faith, as the natural inclination of the will ministers to charity."² Living in the context of committed faith does not mean letting go of human intelligence but rather drawing it into faith's service.

Theology, in this view, is always a biblical enterprise, in that it begins from the understanding of the world and of human history to which the whole canonical Bible bears witness. For the Christian, it is centered on the conviction that Jesus is Lord, that human history is centered in the teaching and death and resurrection of Jesus, who brings God's revelation of himself to unexpected fullness in our midst and who helps us to grasp and live that revelation by the gift of his Spirit. Theology, too, is always rooted in the living tradition of the Church as the process by which this biblical witness is received and interpreted throughout the centuries of the community of faith. It always asks what we might call systematic questions, in that it must look beyond the particulars of biblical texts and events to the rest of our understanding of the world, seeking to embed what we have glimpsed of the ultimate reality of God within our grasp of the rest of reality. And it is always oriented toward practice—that is, toward the moral choices that confront us as people of today's world, toward the way we order the pastoral life and worship of the Church, and toward the quality and regular pattern of our prayer, together and as individuals. Our problems in doing theology well today, I believe, often stem from the tendency present in all academic life to keep the special branches of our knowledge not only distinct but also separate—to treat Biblical studies and exegesis, historical learning, systematic and philosophical questioning, and pastoral and practical questions as if they were different enterprises for the educated believer. If theology, as Aquinas suggests, is really the scientific arrangement and study of the "sacred learning" revelation offers, then all of these aspects must be part and parcel of every theological enterprise, wherever our particular interests and expertise lead us to place the emphasis in our work.

In all of this, I think, the point that needs to be emphasized is that theology is something we *do*, as intelligent believers, in response to the Word of God that has been proclaimed to us in the community and in its tradition of faith. It is our response to that proclamation, our way of making sense of the Word. We *do* theology by thinking and prayerfully meditating about it; by reading about it, discussing it, arguing about its contents and implications; by preaching it and teaching it to others, engaging people in conversation about it; and above all by trying to live in the world as if it were really and ultimately true. "Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only," the Letter of James urges us (Jas 1:22). To be a theologian, we need to be not just a scholar who knows a religious tradition, but a thoughtful practitioner; just as clearly, to be a teacher or a preacher of the biblical tradition, we have to be a practicing theologian.

If we understand theology this way, it almost demands that the person who studies and teaches the field be involved in some kind of research. Research, in the broadest sense, means drawing on our own reading and thought to say something new or helpful or provocative or timely about the Word and the life it requires: shedding new light on a biblical text, rediscovering or reinterpreting some significant part of the long tradition of receiving the biblical message, suggesting how some key aspect of faith might be put in the context of contemporary human questions, linking faith with the moral dilemmas of today's society, or suggesting how the Church needs to live and act if it is to be its authentic self. The real effect on the theologian of doing research, after we have finished the

apprenticeship of graduate school, is really to keep us involved in theology as a practice, in doing the Word and not just hearing it. It keeps us in the conversation with colleagues, critics, anonymous readers, and the authors and scholars, past and present, in all parts of the world who have made contributions to our collective ability to make sense of our faith. As one of my former colleagues from Weston likes to say, "Doing research keeps you from becoming a wind-bag!" It keeps us reading, thinking, formulating our understanding of what the gospel implies; it extends our range, keeps our minds alive.

Doing research also enables us to make some contribution to the long theological tradition from the perspective of our own expertise. What we leave behind us, we hope, when our teaching careers are over, will not just be people formed by our vision of the faith but some perceptible change as well, however small that may be, in the way our field does its work—a change, if only a subtle one, in the way faith is understood. Most of the time, it will be difficult to tell how or even whether this is happening. But we have to make the effort, at least, by remembering that the public we serve is not just the classroom full of students to whom we hold forth and give grades. It is the wider, more long-lived world of colleagues and potential readers, even those who live long after we have left this world ourselves; ultimately, it is the whole people of God.

Theology, after all, is really an art, a craft—the highly verbal craft of putting into powerful and revealing words what God himself has so powerfully revealed to us in his Word-made-flesh. My own conviction—though some would disagree with this—is that theology is really a form of *preaching*, a way of proclaiming what we are convinced is ultimately and fundamentally true. As Christians, we try to communicate again, in our own world, the message of the Apostles that "God is with us"—continually, surprisingly present throughout Israel's history and uniquely, finally present in the person of Jesus and in the Church formed by his Spirit, the Church Paul refers to as Christ's Body. Theology attempts to make the preaching of that message more readily understood and more clearly understandable in the context of today. It may be a boring, analytical form of preaching, but it is nothing more than making the Word, in all its implications and challenges, available and attractive to intelligent human hearers, generation after generation, helping them see its reasonableness and its value.

As preaching, too, theology is also always a form of *teaching*, even if that teaching takes the somewhat impersonal form of a journal article or the critical edition of an early text. Theology makes possible a deeper, more internalized assimilation by believers and potential believers of the news that sets us free; it shows us how that news might apply to our lives today and trains us to integrate it into the rest of our assumptions and goals. Teaching theology in the classroom is just a concrete way of applying the wider teaching function of *being a theologian*: a person who "speaks about God" as the foundation of all that is real. Teaching, research, and publication, for that reason, form a continuum within the whole activity of sharing the news that God is truly with us.

For the same reason, theology is not only a science, as Aquinas would have it, but an *art*—a subspecies, perhaps, of the art of using words persuasively and beautifully, which the ancients called *rhetoric*. Today, many people use *rhetoric*

as a pejorative term, suggesting speech that is merely decorative or even deceitful in its persuasiveness—a way of selling the Brooklyn Bridge or some other artifact the seller may not really possess and the buyer may not really want. It can mean that, of course: rhetoric can be abused, and is abused all the time, as we witness in politics and media advertising. But as Aristotle realized, rhetoric is really an inescapable part of the larger human science of argument: part of the way we reason and persuade is through the careful and skillful use of words—logic made human. And theology, as an artistic way of speaking reasonably and persuasively about God, understandably makes a lot of use of the resources of rhetoric. Great preachers who have shaped the Christian theological tradition—Gregory of Nazianzus, Augustine, Luther, Jonathan Edwards, and so many others—demonstrate in their writings that the *way* the Church's faith is verbalized is an essential component of what theology actually *does*. To enable the news of God's present reality to touch the heart, as well as to persuade the mind, is one of the central tasks of theological speech.

So in doing theology—in speaking and writing our own attempts to give a contemporary understanding to faith—we need to develop a working rhetoric of our own, which will enable us to arrange our ideas convincingly and to put them forth persuasively. We need to find our own voice. This tends to happen, I think, in every field of knowledge. Part of the work of graduate school is to help a prospective theologian learn the conventions, the respectable authorities, and the strategies of argument that can normally be invoked to gain a hearing for an individual understanding of faith. This can be the source of deadening, mindless trendiness, of course; but if judiciously used, it can also help us to think and understand better, to break down barriers in communication, and to get our argument across. And as we get more experience in being doers of the Word, we inevitably develop our own conventions.

I find, for instance, that I tend to write theological papers (almost always on some Patristic subject) in more or less the same overall form and sequence; I haven't consciously sought after it, but it just seems, to my inner aesthetic sense, to be the right way to go about building an argument. I usually begin with some common experience we all share, a story we can all imagine, or a general and arresting observation we can all affirm; I start, in other words, on some kind of common ground. I move on from this to the *topic* I want to cover—Paul in fourth-century exegesis, for instance, or later Greek views of the Trinity, or the connection between early Christian ways of conceiving Persons in God and their approach to the person of Christ. After three or four pages of general problem setting, where I try to develop my view of the question or questions at stake, I briefly explain what I hope to do in the body of *this* paper, by way of giving an answer. I then try to roll out the argument itself, usually under three headings or in three sections (since humans seem to notice and remember things best in threes), going into as much detail from original sources as the argument needs for force and color and keeping bibliographical references and side comments to the endnotes. This usually takes me to about page twenty, after which I try to draw a few synthetic conclusions in a wider perspective. This is the “so what” part of the paper and seems to me the most essential element in the whole effort, provided the arguments up to then have

been sound. And I end, if I can manage it, with a paragraph where this broader sense of the argument's significance is expressed in more affective, sometimes even poetic ways, through a quotation that seems apt or an image that seems to work well. If you can, you always want to warm your audience's heart as you leave the podium or bring your article to a conclusion.

Everyone will develop personal rhetorical conventions, of course—one's own style of argument, one's favorite sentence structures and prose rhythms, one's natural level of diction, and one's most persuasive tone. St. Augustine, in Book 4 of his treatise *On Christian Learning* (*De Doctrina Christiana*), writes perceptive professional commentary about the various levels of style we find in Scripture and employ in preaching, and about the effect they tend to have on the hearer when used. The important point, I think, is that we realize—as Augustine did—that doing theology really *is* an elaborate attempt to persuade our hearers and readers that there is rhyme and reason in the details, as well as in the whole direction, of the Word of God.

My own favorite image for the craft of doing theology—for the kind of work I set out to accomplish in research and writing—is *making watches*! Like watchmaking, doing theology is an intricate, time-consuming, complex project of assembling little pieces carefully, building them meticulously into a functioning whole. It is detailed work, fine-textured labor. You need your glasses. Yet you hope that, in the end, you will succeed in constructing something that, however small in size, will keep working well for fifty years and more, telling its users what they need to know—and that it will also be beautiful and elegant, likely to draw the attention of the connoisseur if not the broader public.

But even if not every article or paper or book manuscript you produce is a work of art—even if some of your watches turn out to be clunkers, thrown together under pressure of time and other commitments (and we all generate these now and then) or if they end up being simply inconclusive because of the difficulty of the questions involved—you still need to have the courage to let them go, to send them out into the academic stratosphere, in the confidence that at least you've done your best and at least you are doing the Word with integrity. I've often noticed, especially among my fellow Jesuits (who tend to be competitive and self-critical to a fault), that anxiety about being subjected to peer criticism, fear of being thought superficial or old-fashioned or "uncool," or even sheer dread of being wrong, can lead to such a defensive state that one never lets go of anything at all, perishing rather than publishing. Academic paralysis is almost as destructive of theological discourse as academic hyperactivity or logorrhea.

The important thing for all of us to realize is that reading, thinking, listening, teaching, writing, and (most of all) praying are all essential aspects of a single art, a single trade: doing theology. Near the beginning of his "First Theological Oration," St. Gregory of Nazianzus makes a famous observation about what ought to be the circumstances in which we practice this art:

Not to everyone, my friends, does it belong to philosophize about God—not to everyone! The subject is not so cheap or so low-flying! And I will add: not at all times, nor before ev-

ery audience, nor on all points; but on certain occasions, and before certain persons, and within certain limits. Not to everyone, because it is permitted only to those who have been tested, and have made good progress in contemplation, and who have been previously purified in soul and body—or who are, at the very least, in the process of being purified . . . And what is the permitted occasion? It is when we are free from all external defilement or disturbance, and when the dominant element in our minds is not confused with troubling or erring images . . . For we must truly be at leisure, and recognize God, and when we find the right moment, discern the straight path for putting our knowledge of God into words. And who are the permitted persons? They to whom the subject is of real concern, who do not make it a matter of pleasant gossip, like the things we chat about after the races or the theater or a concert or a dinner or some erotic involvement. To people like this, bantering debates and pretty theories are simply a part of the exquisite life!³

In other words, we need to be serious, disciplined people and mature religious thinkers to do theology well. But we will never become such mature religious thinkers unless, as we draw closer to God in faith, we keep doing all that is involved in theology. And that includes studying and writing for the wider world.

Brian E. Daley, SJ, is Catherine F. Huisking Professor of Theology at Notre Dame Seminary.

Appendix

Some Theses on Doing Theology

1. *Theology*, discourse about God, is not primarily something you study or know but something you *do*.
2. Doing theology, in a Christian context, means connecting what the Scriptures say to us about God and about how God has worked and continues to work in history and the world, with the rest of what we want to say about history and the world, as intelligent people.
3. Theology can deal with all aspects of human experience and human action—with the character and value of the world around us, with human life, with the principles and boundaries of right action—but it always does this from the perspective of how God has shown himself to us and how we find God in and through our world.
4. We do theology by thinking, discussing, arguing about God and the world; by teaching others to do this, engaging people in conversation about God; by writing down our convictions for others, commenting on Biblical texts and Church traditions; and by living lives that authentically mirror our convictions about the reality of God.
5. Research, in every academic field, is the discovery, conceptualization, and communication of new ways to understand and shape the world and human action, or of better ways to express and connect old patterns of understanding about these same aspects of experience. For theology, research means thinking through again—in our own words and ideas, and with the help of perspectives provided by our own world—some aspect of the message about God, which the community has received through its tradition from Scripture.
6. Theology is different from (good) preaching in literary form, not in purpose. Both attempt to witness to the truth and power of a message coming ultimately from the Apostles (for Christians) or from the tradition of Israel (for both Jews and Christians). Both attempt to paraphrase a tradition of faith and to form links between that tradition and the audience’s everyday experience. Theology just does it, usually at least, in more formal and academic ways.
7. For this reason, theology—in its oral or written form—makes use of its own rhetoric, capturing the essentially elusive content of faith in artful, persuasive words.
8. Theology differs from religious studies, then, above all in the fact that it is rooted in the faith of a worshipping community and is an attempt to

express that faith in reasonable, evocative language. As St. Anselm classically puts it, “I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand” (*Proslogion* 1).

9. All religious people, to one degree or another, are seekers after God; no one’s faith is completely secure or fully formed. We remain in a constant state of quest for confirmation of faith and for a deeper sense of its implications. For that reason, faith and the practice of theology depend on the theologian’s continued involvement in personal reflection and contemplation and in community worship—in all the various forms of prayer that his or her tradition recognizes.
10. Or as Evagrius of Pontus puts it in a famous aphorism: “If you are a theologian, you truly pray. If you truly pray, you are a theologian” (*Chapters on Prayer* 60).

ENDNOTES

1. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theological* I, q.1, aa. 2–7.
2. *Ibid.*, a. 8, resp. ad obj. 2.
3. Gregory of Nazianzus, “First Theological Oration” (27), §3, trans. C. G. Browne and J. E. Swallow, altered.

Crafting Research that Contributes to Theological Education

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ABSTRACT: With homage to writers and poets, even in the form of the article, the author explores the rationale for theological research and characterizes it as a conversation that pairs dancing minds from a variety of contexts as they explore the depths of their identities through epistemology. Focusing on the black experience in particular, the author contends that research is not merely an individual intellectual quest, with its attendant hubris, but rather an interdisciplinary and communal quest that is tethered to humanity, both rooted in the traditions of real people in the public sphere and profoundly impacting them.

Throughout my life, I have always learned a great deal from writers and poets. I speak, primarily, of those who do not deal with dense theoethical discourse and reflection but of writers like Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, Tina McElroy Ansa, Alice Walker, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, Ayn Rand, Carson McCullers, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Jorge Amado, Chinua Achebe, Sonia Sanchez, Nikky Finney . . . the list goes on and on. Their ability to turn the world at a tilt, just so, to explore our humanity and inhumanity, challenges me in ways that theories and concepts do not. As a child, I was transported to Troy by Homer and devoured all I could about Greek and Roman mythology. The idea of gods seemed quite novel to one who was growing up to “Jesus loves me this I know . . .” Apollo and Athena took me out of my daily musing on Jesse Helms and fire hoses. I could enter, through Homer’s prompting, a different time and place where I learned that maybe the holy could be capricious and not always stern.

The gift and challenge of being an avid reader is that I love to read fine writers at work. They help me “see” things in tangible ways and “feel” things through intangible means. My most recent major research project is on theodicy and produced my latest book *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. When I turned to looking at evil, I realized that I would be bound by untenable, unproductive, and ultimately boring ways if I approached such a study solely through the realm of concepts and theories. Instead, I thought, “What has the writing life taught me?” Good writers teach me that there is a world in our eye, but it is not the only one. We can and must consider the eyes and worlds of others. Allowing these worlds to dance or collide with one another has always caused me to grow and to change my angle of vision from the straight and narrow to akimbo.

I will begin this essay in a more self-reflective manner because I believe that crafting research that will contribute to theological education is a conversation about head *and* heart. To ask you to consider doing this, it’s only fair that I be candid with you about where my biases, beliefs, and great faiths are in this enterprise.

So, I want to begin with an image that I hope you will be able to use in your own way to think through your research, teaching, writing, and how you see yourself as a scholar and as a human being. First, a quotation from Toni Morrison:

There is a certain kind of peace that is not merely the absence of war. It is larger than that. The peace I am thinking of is not at the mercy of history's rule, nor is it a passive surrender to the status quo. The peace I am thinking of is the dance of an open mind when it engages another equally open one—an activity that occurs most naturally, most often in the reading/writing world we live in. Accessible as it is, this particular kind of peace warrants vigilance. The peril it faces comes not from the computers and information highways that raise alarm among book readers, but from unrecognized, more sinister quarters.¹

This quotation from Morrison's acceptance speech for the National Book Foundation's Distinguished Contribution to American Letters Award in 1996, focuses on the dangers, the necessities, and the pleasures of the reading/writing life in the late twentieth century. She captures the dangers in two anecdotes she tells. In one, it is the danger that, in her words, "our busied-up, education-as-horse-race, trophy-driven culture poses even to the entitled." In the second, she teases out, again in her words, "the physical danger to writing suffered by persons with enviable educations who live in countries where the practice of modern art is illegal and subject to official vigilantism and murder."²

Morrison's essay is instructive for us. Most of us have learned to survive (and some to thrive) in the realm of her first anecdote. Many of us may have colleagues who work in countries that represent the latter. I suspect that all of us are watching where academic freedom is going in the United States.

But regardless of where we sit and in how many places, it is in the dancing mind that many of us meet one another more often than not. It is in our research—our books and essays and lectures and papers that we often meet for the first, if not the only, time and way. It is in this dancing mind, where we tease through the possibilities and the realities, the hopes, the dreams, the nightmares, the terrors, the critique, the analysis, the plea, the witness—that is done in the academy, in the classroom, in the religious gatherings of our various communities, in those quiet and not so quiet times in which we try to reflect on the ways in which we know and see and feel and do.

For me, this dancing mind is more than an attempt to make sense of the worlds surrounding us—sometimes enveloping us, sometimes smothering us, sometimes holding us, sometimes birthing us. It is more than my desire to reconfigure the world and then invite others to come and inspect the textures, the colors, the patterns, the shapes, the sizes of this new order, this new set of promises and horrors that unfold in my own research.

The dancing mind, in my case, comes from a particular community of communities yearning for a common fire banked by the billows of justice and hope. As such, this particularity marks me with indelible ink. My task is to

explore the twists and turns of the communities from which I spring and have my very life and breath. It is to be very particular about the particular—and explore the vastness of it.

This dancing mind weaves in and out of Africa, the Caribbean, Brazil; the US South, North, East, and West; the Christian, the Jewish, the Muslim, the Candomblé; the Native American; caste of color; sexuality; sexual orientation; socioeconomic class; age; body image; the environment; pedagogies; the academy. It has before it an enormous intracommunal task, one in which I am trying to understand the assortments of African American life—sociocultural and religious. If I do this task well, I will realize the ways in which black life (religious, social, cultural) is not my life alone but a compendium of conscious and unconscious coalitions with others whose lives are not lived solely in the black faces of US life.

This is an important quest for research because I believe that *one* key way to understand how research can and should contribute to theological education is to concentrate on particularities rather than universals. I am interested in exploring the *depths* of African American life—female and male. For it is in exploring these depths, in taking seriously my particularity—not as a form of essentialism, but as epistemology—where I can meet and greet others, for we are intricately and intimately interwoven in our postmodern culture.

In this particularity, I explore the ways in which human lives and cultures have become commodities that are marketed and consumed in the global marketplace. I must stand toe-to-toe with the damaging and destroying effects of the made-in-America color caste hierarchy that remains largely unacknowledged and unexplored. I explore connections between empire and reparations as linked phenomena that spew genderized and racialized moralizations into the global marketplace. I explore the need for recognizing women's moral autonomy within communities as an important factor in developing public policy in the United States. I fret over my own discipline of Christian ethics and the ways in which it does and does not help folk find meaning and purpose in the great drama of existence.

Because I sit in the academy, the church, the classroom, and the community, I must explore socioeconomic class and globalization as it moves in and out of black life with blazing speed—taking the poor *and* the wealthy out of sight. Because we all have to live somewhere, the environment is something I cannot forget to call continually back into my consciousness and work—to broaden the black community's understanding of what is at stake in the atmosphere we breathe beyond the pristine and irrelevant images of Sierra Club calendars that rarely, if ever, put people in nature. I want to help us understand that postmodern culture and the air it spawns will kill us if we do not start paying attention to and then strategizing for a more healthy environment for all of us to live in.

It is this focus on particularity that invites a more expansive awareness and vision for my research. I am challenged to deromanticize the African continent by coming to know its peoples on their terms, not from my own. I am compelled to search out and recover Brazilian streams of consciousness and memory to understand the different ways in which black folk have survived and not survived our own diaspora and the different manifestations of the latent Middle Passage in our historic and contemporary lives.

I must listen to the different rhythms of blackness that come from the different geographies that shape people's bodies and health. I am drawn, sometimes with enormous reservation and circumspection, to understand the different ways in which the religious, beyond my own Christian identity, has shaped my communities and me, and drawn to understand what is at stake when we have lost, forgotten, or been stolen away from the rich medleys of the religious in black life. As I reach further into my particularity, I am brought face-to-face with the tremendous loss of touch with Native American peoples.

I believe that it is through the particularity of the dancing mind that I craft research that can meet and greet those parts of myself that have been lost through neglect, ignorance, well-practiced amnesia, or malicious separation. I am challenged to look at those places that the "isms" that I impose on others are turned back at me, and I am asked to see myself through the eyes of those whom I would and do reject. It does not matter that this rejection is neither intentional nor malevolent. What does matter is that if I say that I am engaged in an integrated and interstructured analysis, then I must face those places within myself and within my work that ignore the ways in which that interstructuring takes place.

I.

i have begun confessionally and self-critically

because i have found in my own life and work that when i launch into an attempt to be rational, critical, analytical, precise, and rigorous in my research

i usually crash and burn if i fail to think first: why am i doing this?

and that is the question i want to begin with

not the crafting of the research (and i will get to that)

but why do any of us do the research we do

here, i am talking about more than "we do the research we do because we are interested in it, or care about it, or are passionate about it, or think it is necessary"

these are more than appropriate personal scholarly benchmarks for our research

and they should and must be a part of what we do when we engage in trying to understand, defend, debunk, question, cajole, illuminate in our research and writing

i am focusing more on what, for me, is the important first step of the dancing mind: why the research in the first place

because i believe that what should drive our research in large measure is that we are exploring traditions that have driven people to incredible heights of valor and despicable lows of violence

in other words, the research we do is not a free-floating solitary intellectual quest

it is profoundly tethered to people's lives—the fullness and the incompleteness of them

and i use the image of tethering intentionally because i do not want to suggest that our work is *circumscribed* by the traditions we explore or not

but rather that we are consciously

and perhaps at times unconsciously

responding to the drama of history lived in creation and we cannot or we should not proceed as if we are engaged in ideas as if there are not people related to them

another way to say this is that i don't believe that research is or should be an objective enterprise

here, i am not equating objective with rigorous

they aren't the same thing at all

and i will always argue for deep-walking rigorous research and scholarship

what i am arguing against is the kind of disinterested research tact that doesn't figure in that our work is going to have a profound impact on someone's life in some way and some how

i worry when we think that we are *only* dealing with ideas and concepts as if they have no heart and soul behind them

if they matter to us, they will matter to others

and we should do our work with passion and precision and realize that we should not aspire to be the dipsticks for intellectual hubris

i am well aware that i am arguing against some of the foundational assumptions in my training and yours

where the scientific research model and its attendant view of reality give us a solid grasp of disciplinary content and methodologies

i do appreciate and actually enjoy the ways in which both chicago and northwestern formed me as a scholar and researcher to explore ideas with gusto and to trust the trail my research leads me in rather than to steer it into the lanes i'd rather travel

but the one thing i am very well aware of is that this training did not teach me how to be teacher and researcher in the schools where i have been on the faculty

as bill myers said in an email exchange with me, our training hopes that we are smart enough to fit our disciplinary work with, as he said, "contexts as different as the religious studies department of a major university or the ministry concerns of a small roman catholic diocesan seminary"

this is a tall order, and working our way through this is one of those vocational challenges that we may not speak of often or choose to suffer through on our own and in silence unwisely

how do we, then, connect our vocational interests with the common vocation of our school

a good place to begin is with the mission statement or description of the aims of the department or any statements like these that set a benchmark for our institutions

the one at yale is new england succinct: To foster the knowledge and love of God through critical engagement with the traditions of the Christian churches in the context of the contemporary world

or its logo version: faith and intellect: preparing leaders for church and world

this provides a marvelous opportunity to use the skills we spend years building—critical engagement

with the overarching educational goal of the school—fostering knowledge, love of god, exploring the tradition, engagement with the world and the piece of creation it represents

how would it be if we spent some time talking about our various mission statements

and then how we see our work relating to it

we may find delightful links that can push our research deeper or in more fruitful directions

we may find that there's a bit of work to do to put them in conversation, but the attempt to do so may reap huge dividends for our work and for our schools

we may even find that we don't know what those statements are

or that our school has one so ancient and unused that only methuselah and his running buddies know it

in short, the possibilities are numerous

and because those of us in this room are at different points in this journey

we should not let the important resources we are for each other slip away during our time together

here is where the dancing mind can be at its best

II.

i am passionate about this because we live in times where our country needs those of us trained in the theological disciplines to speak up and into and with the public square

and we can do so, in part, through and with our schools

and the research we do and share directly with the public

with our students

with our trustees or boards, or boards of advisors

we have amassed an incredible amount of information—yes some of it is arcane

but much more of it is about some things that can actually help folk come to know other peoples and cultures

other forms of the religious

other ways to make meaning out of faith stances

other understandings of the social and moral order of life

other ways to understand sacred texts

and the list goes on and on

in other words, i believe that it is increasingly imperative that we engage religious discourses in the public realm—both in the united states and in international contexts

because we live in an increasingly polarized world and larger academic environment that can often be hostile to things religious

we cannot, as scholars and teachers of religion

absent ourselves from the public conversations we now have about religion

many of us shudder at the simplistic and cartoonish characterizations we see and hear about religious worlds we know to be complex and nuanced

the work we do in our research and in our teaching can and must provide ongoing resources and support for those of us who comment on the religious events of our day in the public sphere

it enriches us as scholars

and it strengthens the ability of our various schools to provide pertinent, informed, accessible, and (when appropriate) faithful information and resources to our students, the communities in which we sit, and the various religious institutions our schools may be representative of and responsible to

why this research?

because people need it to help make sense out of the chaos and spinning top of wars we now live in as part of the mundane and everyday in far too many people's lives

why this research?

because we have some gifts and we should use them

III.

although i am heartened by much of what i see happening in theological education across this country

there is a side that is troubling and a challenge

particularly that which is done in the united states

that can morph into intellectual hubris as global export

and is didactic detritus from sanctifying protestations that true knowledge is universal

as the old black women who raised me used to say about such things:
ummmph . . . ummmph . . . ummmph

and i think it's important that i be clear about what i mean by theological education

it includes not only the education of clergy, but it is practiced in undergraduate and terminal master's degree programs

it is often found in departments of religious studies and in research university doctoral programs

the locations of theological education make it clear that there is a great variety of ways that we get at it—because it represents an epistemology of knowledge³

for some of us, it is education that is specifically about theology

about God or the experience of God

for others, we focus on the development of character and skills in life and holiness

method is the focus for some

we explore the nature of the process—is it focused on academic research or is it a personal search to find the ultimate good

still others focus on ethos and the importance of individual and community spirituality permeating the educational process

context is important for others as the focus is on the academy, the religious body, or the society

others focus on the people involved and does the faith of those involved define some education as being theological even if the content may not be overtly so

the list goes on and on

but whether it is modeled after David Kelsey's Athens and Berlin typology, Robert Bank's Jerusalem model, or Brian Edgar's Geneva model

the common thread is theology

and there are many, many possibilities about what can be seen as central theologically

this ethics of knowing

has extraordinary relevance as we unfold into a troubling twenty-first century

with contested political races

massive voter registration drives that were countered with massive disenfranchisement

a war on terror that is going horribly wrong

blazing internal conflicts in countries like afghanistan, colombia, darfur, iraq, the ivory coast, georgia, haiti, kashmir, kyrgyzstan, nepal, the philippines, somalia, sri lanka, and uganda

broken levees, broken promises, broken economy

this list goes on and on as well

as troubling as this century is already, there are also profound signs of humanity as well

after an alarming decline, charitable giving is on the rise in the united states

the response to the december 2004 tsunami that devastated the regions surrounding the indian ocean

the outpouring of private and corporate support to the victims of hurricane katrina and the devastation wreaked by broken and poorly designed and built levees

giving for research in medicine and the social sciences

endowing scholarships

support for museums and orchestras

are a large part of this

and we should not miss that it is individual giving by living people that accounts for three-quarters of total charitable giving in the united states

the epistemology of knowledge that is represented in theological education is always contextual

always fraught with our best and worst impulses

it is never objective

it is never disinterested

no matter how many rational proofs we come up with to argue to the contrary

research that contributes to theological education recognizes this

embraces this

does not seek to obfuscate this

and recognizes the utter humanity of this

and then begins with the concreteness of our humanity rather than solely in esoteric concepts abstracted from life

that teach us or lure us into believing that it is better to live in an unrelenting ontological suicide watch

rather than a celebration of the richness and responsibilities of what it means to be created in the image of god

for dancing minds, the challenges become integrity, consistency, and stubbornness—not objectivity

these do not displace objectivity

no, they become part of our methodological toolkit as well and are as valued as the call for objectivity

because there is much to be said for holding ourselves accountable

which is, i think, ultimately what these calls for objectivity in the theological disciplines is all about

we just forget that a serious *and* capricious god has a hand in creation

and our intellectual musings often forget god's laughing side

and this can make too much of what we do humorless and inept in our educational homes

when recognizing these things, we can do relevant research

excellent teaching

and learning

with dancing minds that point to that vital triumvirate of love, justice, and hope

we are then moving from *concepts* in hermeneutical, historical, pastoral, theological, discourses

to *tools* that demystify and deconstruct

and turn to building and enlightening

part of what is involved in crafting research that will contribute to theological education and the lives of people beyond the library or our studies or our offices

is that we must think in more expansive ways than our disciplinary homes have often trained us to think with our intellect focused primarily on our scholarly navels

this is tricky business because in doing so, we may also be challenging the holy of holies in many of our disciplines

and reconfiguring the standards of excellence in them

i am aware that this is hard for many younger scholars and junior faculty to do as you are also casting a concerned eye to tenure and advancement issues and the very real concerns of family and survival

but i have come to that place in my career where i think that too many of the standards of excellence in many of our disciplines in theological education are not only too low, they may well be irrelevant

so part of what i am asking you to consider today is how your research figures into this

and how can we, together, think through the ways to juggle both the academy and the folks we face in the classroom each day and the many folks that they bring in the classroom with them who are not

seen, not heard, but intensely affected by what we say based on the research we do

perhaps strategic schizophrenia is one answer

that we see our research running on at least two parallel tracks

one that tries to continually call our disciplines into excellence and revelation

the other that has both feet firmly planted in the everydayness of living

in doing so, i think we learn to actually value the messiness of the earth's groaning to survive what we do to it as an active and engaging theological dialogue partner

and as the chief guide for the kinds of questions that should fuel what we do as theological intellectuals

who must—absolutely must—become public intellectuals engaged in justice seeking, justice making, and justice living through what we do

as well as how we think about it and research it

to do any less casts me back in time

to that 60s cocktail party in which ralph ellison

the author of *invisible man*

spoke in “clipped, deliberate syllables” to his peers

Show me the poem, tell me the names of the opera/the symphony that will stop one man from killing another man and then maybe—he gestured toward the elegant bejeweled assembly with his hand that held a cut-crystal glass of scotch—just maybe some of this can be justified.⁴

i am relieved to say that i am not left in ellison's condemnatory despair

perhaps it is because i rather like coming from a signifying and unsettling population

that i am left with a frustrating hope that does not immobilize, but strategizes

however, i am incandescently clear that signification is arbitrary and frustrating

but i think that the critical engagement of dancing minds, that signification can evoke, can lead us into fruitful interdisciplinary conversations in our research that helps us turn to the other side of hegemony

because signifying is a tool that can confuse, redirect, or reformulate the discourses of domination that are often at the heart of what we inherit in far too much religious scholarship

each of our disciplines represented in this room

baptist studies
canon law
christian education
christian social ethics
history: american church, church, liturgical, music, of christianity
hebrew bible/old testament
historical theology
homilectics
music: liturgical, gregorian chant
new testament/early christian studies
patristics
spirituality
theology: liturgical, practical, systematic

has its own hegemonic edge

and when working well, makes tremendous contributions to the work of our schools

but we are so much better at our research when we begin to talk with colleagues in other disciplines and begin to explore questions, ideas, concepts, situations informed by another set of lenses that give us new vistas to explore

we then value and incorporate the ideas, insights, and experiences of folks who are in ministry

not as illustrations to make a hard wrought point

but integrated fully into how we shape that point, insight, idea, possibility

what arrogance we commit when we allow the inadequacies of our training

to determine what can come to know

and how

to tackle this, is not a condemnatory judgment

but a challenge to keep growing our scholarship large

interdisciplinary work is only now being taken seriously in some graduate programs

some think that this is faddish or inept scholarship

but having been raised in two interdisciplinary programs—one that was up front about it with northwestern and one that was more covert about it with chicago

and having spent my early years immersed in interdisciplinary team teaching at saint paul school of theology

i learned quickly that you can't do interdisciplinary work without a main discipline as your intellectual home

so i am not arguing for an interdisciplinary toga party for our research and scholarship

i *am* suggesting that interdisciplinary work is crucial for those of us who are trying to open up the stuffy kitchens in our disciplines and invite all manner of folk to sit around the table

and to do so we can use signifying as more than a clever language game

for in the hands of rigorous dancing minds, signification can debunk narrow and restricted scholarship masquerading as immaculate theological conceptions

like the gramscian chess moves of hegemony

it is very important just *who* is doing the signifying and *why*

allowing our minds, our scholarship to dance we can come to welcome new conversation partners be they disciplinary or representative

not to control or dominate

but to allow the richness of insights and experiences beyond what we know and don't know

to fill our scholarship with deeper meaning

to beget more piercing analysis

to offer more trenchant critique

to be more relevant to the schools in which we work and the folks that are influenced by what we do in theological education

and we develop skills and scholarship that help mitigate bravura spells of ignorance and arrogance that can be found even within the work of some of us trying to deconstruct and reconstruct our disciplines if not our religious households and schools

IV.

according to Morrison, the dancing mind requires “an intimate, sustained surrender to the company of my own mind as it touches another.”

she encourages us “to offer the fruits of [our] imaginative intelligence to another without fear of anything more deadly than disdain.”⁵

this is the how we begin to take the first steps toward crafting research that will contribute to theological education

it is to dance into a new future that is more vibrant, more life bringing and giving, more welcoming, more humane

more alive with possibilities that engage others and ourselves

it is serious work

it is important work

it is necessary work

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ENDNOTES

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History, Seminary, and Vocation

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ABSTRACT: This essay examines the relation between disciplinary commitments and the vocation of theological education. As a historian in a school of theology, I have felt obligated to transmit a tradition, help students learn to balance distance and appreciation, and convey a sense of the complexity of seeing and naming. But seminary historians also have other responsibilities to the church, the society, and the academy, and their location in a seminary subtly affects the way they accomplish these tasks.

All of my academic career, I've worked historically, so it seems appropriate to consider my research and my vocation within a larger historical accounting. I can't separate my vocation as a theological educator from my vocation as a historian.

It is useful to remember, as prelude, that it took a long time for the history of Christianity to secure a place in seminary classrooms. Ezra Stiles proposed a course in ecclesiastical history at Yale in 1777, but it found no place in the regular curriculum. The first Catholic seminary, St. Mary's, founded in 1791 near Baltimore, ignored the subject for more than half a century.¹

The first significant Protestant seminary, Andover, founded in 1808, fell into the same historical amnesia, even though the Andover constitution prescribed lectures on ecclesiastical history. Earl Thompson has told us the story. When the merchant Moses Brown endowed a historical chair at Andover, the faculty persuaded him to change it to a chair of sacred rhetoric and permit its occupant to teach history only "so far as leisure and opportunity may permit." But when James Murdock assumed the chair, he wanted to teach history, and partly because of his stubborn insistence on it, the faculty tried to force him to resign. Murdock threatened to appeal to the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, so the Andover board backed down, but in 1825 they revised the curriculum, devoting the first year to the Bible, the second to theology, and the third to sacred rhetoric, with a few lectures in church history toward the end of the senior year, as summer approached.² Murdock rebelled, and the next faculty meeting fell into chaos, with otherwise staid faculty members shouting at each other and storming out of the room. The theologian Leonard Woods told the trustees that the study of history should be "altogether subordinate," and Ebenezer Porter worried openly about its effect on doctrinal solidity.³ If students had an early exposure to "the multifarious forms of religious beliefs in past ages," they would either waver in their creed or blindly submit to human authority. Leonard Woods agreed: too much history would draw them aside from a biblical standard of truth.⁴ The students found this exciting, and in 1827 they signed a petition calling for more church history, whereupon the faculty complained of student disrespect, and the board dismissed Murdock for paying insufficient attention to sacred rhetoric. Two years later, the board redesigned the chair as a professorship in Pastoral Theology and Ecclesiastical History.⁵

When Henry Boynton Smith went to Union Seminary in 1850, finally holding a chair devoted solely to church history and convinced that historical study could renew and reform theology, the eminent biblical scholar Edward Robinson argued that it made no sense to spend four hours a week studying church history. Three would be more than enough—and leave sufficient time for additional work in biblical exegesis.⁶

In 1889, the founders of the Catholic University of America promised that the school would offer a course on the history of the early church, but they had to postpone the course because the faculty member who was to teach it was in Berlin trying to learn the subject matter.

Not until the last decades of the nineteenth century did historical study begin to gain a firmer foothold in the theological schools. In 1874, Egbert Smyth told the senior class at Andover that because of “great changes” in the relation between history and theology, the historical department at Andover had finally been granted “a larger share of time.”⁷

So it took a long time for my predecessors to ensure that there would be a seminary job awaiting me when I left graduate school.

What, then, is my vocation as a historian working in the seminary setting?

Transmitting tradition accurately

For one thing, I have felt a sense of responsibility simply to help students get a clearer picture of the forces that formed them and formed the churches in which most of them will work—forces theological, social, political, and economic. I can illustrate the point with a series of examples that you have heard before—but they fit so perfectly here that I have to use them one more time. I refer, of course, to Richard Lederer’s collection of bloopers on high school and college history exams on the sixteenth-century Reformations:

Martin Luther was nailed to the church door at Wittenberg for selling papal indulgences. He died a horrible death, being excommunicated by a bull.

The government of England was a limited mockery. From the womb of Henry VIII Protestantism was born. Henry found walking difficult, because he had an abbees on his knee.

Queen Elizabeth was the “Virgin Queen.” As a Queen, she was a success. When Elizabeth exposed herself before her troops, they all shouted “hurrah.” Then her navy went out and defeated the Spanish Armadillo.

It was an age of great inventions and discoveries. Gutenberg invented the Bible. Another important invention was the circulation of blood. Sir Walter Raleigh is a historical figure

because he invented cigarettes and started smoking. And Sir Francis Drake circumcised the world with a 100-foot clipper.⁸

So my first responsibility is to try to ensure that my students don't egregiously misread the past. It is not that they will be free of mistakes. I confess to you that I have not been free of mistakes. I have been astonished at how easy it is, as a writer, to make mistakes. I still cringe when I think of some I have made. But written history is not simply a construction; the past pushes back at us and compels us to acknowledge our mistakes. And I want to help students—and myself—make as few as we can.

That is part of our responsibility in seminaries—to transmit a tradition. About 50 percent of the clergy in America do not have a seminary education. They may be quite effective at doing many things in their congregations. Some of them may be more effective than some of our graduates. But they have not been exposed to the larger traditions of the church in a way that enables them to transmit them. The best of our seminary graduates can do that—and they can therefore witness against the American tendency to cast their lot with variants of Christianity—like the prosperity gospel—that have, at a minimum, fragile links to the Christian past.

Coming to terms with our past

I also feel a responsibility, as a seminary teacher, to help students come to terms with their own pasts, both individual and communal. And I happen to believe that we cannot come to terms with our past unless we recognize the intertwining of distance and acceptance, unless we see that there is no distance without acceptance and no acceptance without distance. That is, we cannot acquire any distance from our own history, our own past, unless we can value it unashamedly. But that valuing of our past is not free—is not really ours—unless it contains within it a certain critical distance. If we cannot value our own history, then our movement toward distance is likely to lead to a trap. The movement toward distance can become a thoroughgoing rejection of our past, and that entails a rejection of an inescapable part of ourselves. The result is a kind of perpetual insecurity, precisely because there is always a dimension of ourselves of which we are ashamed—namely, our past.

But if we cannot criticize our own history, then our movement toward the valuing of our past, the appreciation of our history, is likely to lead to another trap. The affirmation of our past can become a refusal to recognize that our history has boundaries, and that, too, entails a rejection of an inescapable part of ourselves: our freedom for the future. The result is a kind of perpetual defensiveness, precisely because there is always a dimension of ourselves to which we cling for reassurance—namely, our past.

There is no distance without acceptance, and no acceptance without distance.⁹

The relation between seeing and naming

Third, I feel a sense of responsibility to help students grasp the complexity of the relation between seeing and naming. When we study the past, we begin

to recognize a certain irony: a premature naming can prevent our seeing, and yet we have to name in order to see. Our naming gives form to our seeing; our seeing expands our naming.

When my wife and I walk in the woods, she literally sees more than I do, because she can name the wildflowers. I see a clump of green weeds: she sees four clearly distinguishable kinds of flowers, each with its own contour and character.

Many of our students are prone to a premature naming—a naming that occurs before they have taken the time to really look at people and traditions who are different from them. The result is an unthinking prejudice about the past that gives us a sense that we are justified in dismissing much of it. So we have Protestant students who have never looked closely at Catholic traditions, and they assess the richness of the Catholic tradition prematurely (and sometimes prejudicially), and we have Catholic students who fall into the same trap. Conservatives and liberals, African Americans and Euro Americans, Christians and Jews, Christians and Muslims, men and women, gay and straight, believers and nonbelievers—all of us are prone to a premature naming of the other.

Part of overcoming that tendency is the willingness to look closely at the other, and that means, for the historian, looking closely at the other's history. I have failed at this again and again, but our failures don't excuse us from picking ourselves up and trying again. That's why we criticize as well as praise one another in our book reviews. All of us are struggling to see a little more and a little better, and we need each other—we need our critics—in order to become better at naming and seeing. The more we see, the better we can name; and the better we can name, the more we can see.

The English novelist Iris Murdoch often wrote about the difficulty we have in keeping our attention fixed upon the real situation and preventing it from returning to ourselves. She has written of the honesty and humility required of the student—the humility that takes form as a respect for reality (respect: a looking and a looking again), an attempt to see the world as it is, to see the past as it was, a refusal to pretend to know what one does not know.

I know that we can't recapture the past "as it really was." I know that our own preconceptions color our judgments of relevance about the past. But still, the past pushes back. We recognize that we can make mistakes about the past—our narration is not merely construction—and so we try to get it better, we try to look more closely, we try to respect our subject matter. I often tell students that that kind of seeing is a kind of unselfing but not by the destruction, the annihilation of the self. It is a going-out from ourselves into a reality that is other than ourselves, into something that resists our efforts to suck everything into our own subjectivity. And that, it seems to me, is an illuminating description of our relation to the past—to our own histories and to our wider history—when we begin to recognize the complexity of naming and seeing.

A number of students at Emory wonder now and then if there is any relation between their work in the classroom and their vocation as ministers. I think that there is. At least there is as long as the classroom is providing new ways of seeing, new names, new ways of naming, more precise distinctions. To pore through a sixteenth-century text is to gather fresh ways of seeing, new ways of

taking note of other persons. To struggle with a nineteenth-century text is to learn something about the difficulty of really listening to another person (a person who may be quite alien to me). To look carefully at the history of Christianity is to disabuse ourselves of some of our prejudices. It is to recognize that our particular tradition is a fragment of a larger tradition. To see our tradition as the seat of all virtue and others' as mistaken side paths is to name prematurely; but to see our tradition as so flawed and imperfect that it lacks all value—as some students are inclined to do—is also to give it a premature name.

What difference does that make for our scholarship?

The American seminary, at its inception, was the first American educational institution designed—at least in theory—for a graduate education, and the best ones provided a demanding course of study. John Todd, studying at Andover in the 1820s, wrote a friend that he was “buried up in theology” and “driven in study,” having to recite three times a week in theology, once in Hebrew and once in Greek, in addition to attending lectures and meeting with four societies for debate and education. And the best seminaries were places for scholarship. Not all of them, only a few. I don’t want to romanticize the story. In 1844, Edwards Amasa Park at Andover wrote a pseudonymous essay in *Bibliotheca Sacra* to try to counter the charge of the Germans that Americans had “no tastes for theological science” or for any other study “save that of the laws of steam and of political government.” Park had to concede that most seminaries had low standards and little scholarship. He conceded that ministers lacked the time to read what the scholars wrote. He lamented that American publishers seemed to respect only market demand in deciding what to print. And he admitted that scholars sometimes found it hard to speak clearly and winsomely to institutions of a “popular character.” Park also worried about the accessibility of theological scholarship to the public. He lamented the “awkwardness of scholarly prose.” It was not, he said, “sufficiently wedded to an aesthetical spirit.” And he lamented the inability of scholars to clothe “solidity of thought” in a “comely and alluring garb” that would reach the wider public in the churches.¹⁰

We shouldn’t overstate the scholarly ambitions of the early seminary faculties. The Catholic bishop John Lancaster Spalding noted in 1884 that “the ecclesiastical seminary is not a school of intellectual culture, either here in America or abroad.”¹¹ In the 1920s, Robert Kelly studied 161 Protestant seminaries and concluded that, with rare exceptions, they were “not conspicuous as centers of scholarly pursuits.” “Not many seminaries,” he said, “make any claim that their faculties have time or equipment to carry on research work.”¹²

Yet the schools were beginning to think more about scholarly research. In the early twentieth century, Catholic seminary instructors began to earn doctoral degrees from Roman and other European faculties, and in 1931 an apostolic constitution required dissertations that showed original research. The Catholic seminaries began to fill up with a new generation of instructors trained in research methods.¹³ In the 1930s, Mark May and William Adams Brown, who oversaw the most ambitious study of seminary education

that Americans had ever carried out, found that 57 percent of the teachers in Protestant seminaries had written one book or more—the average was three—with about five articles, though faculties tended to rank scholarship relatively low on their list of priorities.¹⁴

By the time H. Richard Niebuhr, Daniel Day Williams, and James Gustafson published *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* in 1956, they described the theological school as “the intellectual center of the Church’s life.” They found that expectations about research and writing varied from school to school, but more and more of the schools were beginning to see research scholarship as part of their responsibility.¹⁵

Credentials

First, the doctoral research degree gradually became the norm for seminary instruction. Between 1795 and 1870, only about 5 percent of seminary faculty had such a degree. By 1924, the number rose to 31 percent in Protestant schools; in the 1930s, it rose to 40 percent; in the 1950s, 65 percent. The general institutional standards of the ATS Commission now stipulate that faculty members “shall possess the appropriate credentials for graduate theological education, normally demonstrated by the attainment of a research doctorate”¹⁶

Tenure

Kelly’s study failed to mention tenure, and neither did the May and Brown survey. The Niebuhr group found that tenure reviews that considered scholarship were the rule in university-related seminaries alone. But within twenty-five years of Niebuhr’s study, 94 percent of Protestant and Orthodox seminaries offered tenure, along with 29 percent of the Catholic schools, and most tenure decisions involved some degree of attention to research and scholarship.¹⁷

Sabbaticals

Kelly found in the 1920s that seminaries rarely granted sabbatical leaves. May and Brown in the 1930s didn’t even refer to them. The Niebuhr study in the 1950s found sabbaticals practiced mainly in the university-related schools. But by 1985, a substantial number of schools were saying that sabbatical leaves were among the most important means of supporting “scholarly work.”¹⁸

Financial support

In the 1920s and 1930s, almost nothing was available. Even in the 1950s, Niebuhr reported that “scholars in religion rarely receive grants equivalent to the Guggenheim fellowship for advanced work.”¹⁹ Some scholars had access to funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities, but not many. By that time, ATS could say that “research is an essential component of theological scholarship and should be evident in the work of both teachers and students.”²⁰ And the scholarship now produced in seminaries outranks, in sophistication and quantity, the productivity of all but the select few among the seminary faculties of the past.

Encouraging research and scholarship

If the seminary is to attract really good scholars, it will have to find creative ways to encourage research and scholarship.

In 1996, Clark Gilpin reminded us in *A Preface to Theology* that scholars in nineteenth and twentieth century seminaries wrote for three audiences: the church, the larger society, and the academy. He recognized that the categories overlapped and that the overlap often defines the ideal of scholarship in a seminary—to write in ways that can address all three audiences.²¹

By 1830, Americans had founded 193 religious journals and newspapers, 131 of which claimed association with a denomination. The leading seminaries almost always had theological reviews, which were among the most erudite journals published in America. The theological articles were usually exegetical and theological. They took up topics like human ability and inability, sin, regeneration, Christ, grace, heaven, hell, God, and the end times. Or they were practical, dealing with preaching, missions, and congregational practice.

Theology helped define, for decades, the teaching of American colleges and universities. G. Stanley Hall complained in the late nineteenth century that American philosophy departments knew more about E. A. Park and Nathaniel William Taylor than they did about Kant and Hegel. And the theology also helped to define America's social struggles. Theological schools never saw the welfare of the churches as their *sole* aim. They also saw themselves as responsible for a wider civic harmony, a just society, a national culture. Even in the early nineteenth century, the seminary journals published essays about such issues as capital punishment, the temperance movement, criminal law, American schools, women's rights, and slavery. The aims of theological education extended into the public sphere.

By the late nineteenth century, the journals became sites for writing about economics, the ethics of corporations, urban taxation, housing reform, racial justice, and equal treatment for women. Shailer Mathews of the University of Chicago could take it for granted in 1912 that the church and its scholars should address "the welfare of the community in all its interests, physical and spiritual."²² And Niebuhr and company called for research related to social action and the structures of power and status in American society. Such research was necessary for a "full understanding of the Christian faith itself."²³

Finally, seminary faculty wrote books and articles designed primarily for the academy. The academic interests could include research on topics that at first glance did not seem to be crafted particularly for theological education. *Bibliotheca Sacra* in 1844, for example, contained essays on the Chinese language, French etymology, and passages in Plato's *Gorgias*.

More than 150 years ago Park called for more "division of labor" on theological faculties on the grounds that no one could "treat thoroughly so extensive a class of themes" as schools of theology were supposed to teach. Yet he also lamented that theology was already so specialized that "an individual theologian is often thoroughly versed in but a small part of the whole science." And the specialists did not always get along with each other. The systematicians disparaged the exegetes, who depreciated philosophy, while the philologists

scorned the systematicians, and the rhetoricians had no use for the researchers. "Every single department comes in this way, to have its own partisan-admirers . . . apt to become indifferent to all the others, if not openly opposed to them."²⁴

But specialization became the norm. By 1904, Benjamin Bacon at Yale said it was the only way to save theology from "a hopeless and contemptible inferiority to the other sciences."²⁵

With the founding of the *American Catholic Quarterly Review* in 1876, the *Journal of Biblical Literature* in 1882, and the *American Journal of Theology* in 1896, seminary scholars began to publish a different kind of erudite and focused article. Essays on "Harnack's 'Probabilia' Concerning the Address and the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews" or "Economic Self-interest in the German Anti-Clericalism of the 15th and 16th Centuries" represented specialized expertise employed to advance scholarship.

It is true that by the 1950s, the Niebuhr report worried about seminary scholars who "retreat into their scholarly specialties and lose contact with the Christian cause." Scholarship can become so esoteric that only a dozen specialists can read it. But let us make a space in our seminaries for some minute and esoteric scholarship. Sometimes it can have fruitful and surprising consequences.²⁶

Esoteric scholarship is not the main threat to the scholarly vocation of American seminaries. The more pressing issues now are economic. Barbara Wheeler has written of changes in the publishing industry that make it increasingly difficult for specialized scholarship to make it into print. Beginning in the 1970s, she notes, large corporations discovered publishing, and the denominations, pressed for money, slowly withdrew support, so that "the ideas most likely to make their way in book form to the public" are now "those that large audiences are willing to buy."²⁷ The financial crash has made the problem worse, especially for younger scholars.

The role of location

But let me conclude by reflecting on how my location in a seminary has affected my own writing. As early as 1987, David Hall wrote an essay titled "On Common Ground: The Coherence of American Puritan Studies."²⁸ He distinguished four groups of historians who were writing at that time on the Puritan tradition: intellectual historians continued in the tradition of Perry Miller by taking Puritan thought seriously; social historians remained suspicious of that approach, though the distance between social and intellectual history was not as great as it had once been; literary historians sought to link the Puritans to an emerging American tradition; and the seminary historians sought to link them to a wider history of Christian religious tradition.

Now, styles of history have changed in the past two decades, and seminary historians have interests in social history, lived religion, and even literary history, but David Hall's point is still telling. Something about your institutional location can alter your angle of vision. If you write on Puritan sacramental thought from a seminary setting, you are likely to immerse yourself for a while in the sixteenth-century controversies; if you write on theology in the nineteenth-century South, you see continuities with medieval theology; if

you write on the history of pastoral care in America, you notice remnants of medieval conceptions of the soul; if you write on notions of health and well-being, you observe eighteenth-century English religious parallels; if you write on theology in America, you compare and contrast notions of practicality in nineteenth-century and medieval scholastic traditions; if you write a social history of the clergy, you might be likely to begin chapter one, as I did, in the first century.

Now that is not the only way to tell the story of religion in America. Historians, whether they teach in seminaries or universities, tell multiple stories using a vast range of methods. All of them can be helpful, insightful, illuminating. They can help us understand who and where we are. No one social or institutional location should make claims of a monopoly on historical insight. Let a thousand flowers blossom.

But it is important that some of those flowers have their origins in an institution that encourages the historian—and other scholars too—to be aware of a past that extends to the first century and beyond; to be aware of the varieties of religious practice in a universal church; and to struggle, at least some of the time, with issues that continue to occupy the interest of pastors and laity and general readers who dwell outside the academy and live in worlds different from the one in which I have spent my career.

And allow me one final story. In 1976, I wrote an article in the *New Republic* on Jimmy Carter during his campaign for the presidency. Martin Peretz, the editor, called me and said that as a secular Jew he couldn't even begin to decipher Carter's language about his religion. Would I write about it? I asked him to let me think about it, and three minutes later I called him back and agreed. But before I sent it off, I invited several members of our faculty to my home—ethicists, historians, New Testament scholars, and others—and they gave it a critique. Or better, they worked on it with me. It probably reached more people than anything else I ever wrote. We lived in Germany in 1976–77, and our landlady knocked on our door one day with a copy of *Der Spiegel* in which there was a reference to the *New Republic* article. Is this you, she asked? Well, I said "yes." But I should have said "yes and no." It was us. It was a communal effort.

Seminaries are sites of disciplinary expertise, but they are also, despite E. A. Park's laments, inherently interdisciplinary, and their interdisciplinary character informs the way we think about topics, the issues that we consider important, and the kinds of criticism we can seek and receive. In a time of economic struggle, it will be harder for seminaries to provide the resources for serious intellectual work. But it is important not to abandon the goal. Seminary scholars still have some distinctive things to say to a wider world of scholarship. We should consider it an obligation to say them as well as we can.

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The Mystery of Meaning

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ABSTRACT: The author reflects on her three and a half decades of scholarship and teaching in theological schools and urges her readers to move beyond the "choking grasp of literalisms of many kinds," "the iron reign of historical criticism," of "philological determinisms," and critical theories that treat the text as "a math problem or a template for analysis." She urges them to a love of biblical texts where people can find words for life in a mystery of meaning that reflects the mystery of the human relationship with the Divine. Her approaches to teaching and the reading of texts have been powerfully formed by multicultural conversations and contexts as well as interdisciplinary insights.

I am on the cusp of retiring after about thirty-five years or more of theological teaching—depending on how one counts my various enterprises—and I am still trying to learn how to do it. This is not a humble statement: it is a fact. I am deeply honored by this invitation from ATS and grateful for the opportunity to reflect on my vocation as theological educator, its challenges and joys, and to say publically how thankful I am for this life of learning and teaching and for generous, exciting companions with whom to do it. In these reflections, I would like to present understandings and practices of theological education that have arisen from my particular biography and social location. Besides desiring deeper clarity for myself, I want to promote conversation among us about what we are all trying to do as biblical scholars and theological educators.

My search

Many years ago the late Tikva Frymer-Kensky spoke at a session on biblical theology at an annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature. She said that what engaged her attention was not the "meaning of mystery but the mystery of meaning." I can give no more specifics about her words or that session because I was caught in the moment, lost in the activity of interpretation that she was naming, captured by the joy that moving around in texts creates, as if the text were a room full of beautiful furniture, wall paintings, colors and fabrics, populated by people filled with pain and love, deception and hatred, hope and despair, with us walking around trying to glimpse the mystery of meanings hidden there. Frymer-Kensky was not trying to nail down God, explain the unexplainable, or give us a history of mystery. She was naming a creative process, a spiritual process of reading, of interpretation of our sacred texts driven by hope of discovery, a process that can itself be a taste of ecstasy, a participation in the mystery of meaning, where more eludes us than appears to us, where, in the process, someone greets us, welcomes us, and forms us into a community.

Frymer-Kensky did not say that; my riff on her words may distort her thinking, but those words startled me into some deeper recognitions. Her words have become a kind of mantra because they break open the choking grasp of literalisms of many kinds, not only ones surrounding notions of biblical inspiration that students often bring with them but also of the iron reign of historical criticisms in search of the one true meaning, of philological determinisms, and of critical theories of various sorts that treat the text as if it were a math problem or a template for analysis. Her words make interpretation itself a religious experience, and this is why I love them.

Jorge Luis Borges of Argentina, who some think was the greatest writer of the twentieth century, put it another way. He believed (about literature in general) that “reading was faith; writing a call-and-response form of prayer. To love a text: isn’t that just to find oneself helplessly casting about for something to say in return?”¹ Theological education is about love, infectious, imperfect, elusive love—love of texts, of students, of the world, and casting about helplessly for something to say back!

My scholarship and my teaching are meager efforts to invite others into this love, into the mystery of meaning, to lead, to provoke, and to coax them to love the biblical texts and to find there words for life, words to say in return that invite others into the mystery of meaning, into the mystery of relationship with the Divine.

Our work as theological educators is complex, and my spiritual sense of it is so easily overcome by its many demands. I have been searching for an image to describe relationships among elements involved in theological education and keep returning to the mobile that hangs in my study at home right in front of my desk. A gift from a colleague, the mobile looks something like a mini-Calder, a suspended sculpture. The mobile comprises an elliptical wire, from which hang two threads, each with a series of small wire prongs or stems that end in a circle of colored glass—reds, oranges, greens, blues, yellows. The two strings are of different lengths, of various sizes, and the colored prongs, stair-stepped, circulate separately, make various configurations, catch the light, sparkle, darken, constantly move with the air yet somehow stay in balance. This is not an image of my life, more the image of the search that has been my life as theological educator.

Except now, looking back, I glimpse how the variegated prongs, the constant motion, and the seemingly separate nature of studying, teaching, writing, reading, advising, speaking, “committee-izing,” conference attending, grading, editing, reviewing, and recommending align briefly and then separate again. Among the tasks of the theological educator, different ones become more important in different years, but teaching and scholarship have absorbed my major energy, and although I try to be a good citizen of the seminary and the scholarly institutions in which I am engaged, these other tasks float in and out, often as distractions, obligations to be performed, to be got out of the way as necessary housekeeping, often haphazardly, even when they can be fun and satisfying.

And there are other less visible yet persistent prongs in the life of the theological educator, such as tending to relationships—marital, familial, collegial, professional, ecclesial, and social—all too often pushed to the margins

by overriding deadlines. And, I want to insist, one must tend to the inner life, somehow the easily overlooked heart of the matter, the time for entering the soul as the chamber of wounds, denials, and alienations, that inner place of emotion, desire, and joy that forms a deep spring of contact with God, that glimpse of the elusive center of one's being where compassion for the world finds its energy and the source of its true authority, a source so readily obscured by the values of life in the United States, by frenzied, globalizing technologies, and by the "too-muchness" of daily life in seminary and university.

Teaching

To speak about my vocation as theological educator, I begin with teaching and then turn to scholarship and writing. I have to begin with teaching because learning to teach contributed to my desire to become a scholar and because teaching has been a major source of learning, a mode of discovery that has profoundly affected my scholarship, even as my research has, in turn, driven my teaching. Here's what teaching has taught me.

Learning to teach

I learned to teach by beginning with seventh and eighth graders in a Roman Catholic elementary school when I became a Dominican Sister shortly after college. My teaching life was rooted in two things: a desire to show young people riches of faith and a profound necessity to get and keep their attention (no small matter). Because the elementary school was attached to a college run by the Order, I had great resources in model teachers and educational theory. Early on I read Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* about the failure of "banking models" of teaching for most people, how they teach passivity, how people need to name their own worlds, and about the power of discovery, of provoking conversation, of encouraging self-motivated learning. This reading happened in conjunction with my reading of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, an electrifying experience. Naming the world, becoming an active agent of one's own fate, and taking control of one's own learning were not abstract ideas that seemed good for the students only; they were also about my empowerment, finding my voice, and becoming more fully an actor rather than one acted upon.

These experiences inspired me to try to involve students in their own learning over the years, sometimes with success, often not. The reasons the effort mattered, though, is that I realized that teaching was, for me, conversation in which I keep learning myself, not simply from my research but also from interactions in the classroom. Using adult learning methods turns teaching into a school for the teacher as well as the students. It forces new ways to think about texts or deepens old understandings, and it reveals the needs of students, their flashing brilliances and their opaque indifferences. I stress this because I have learned so much about the place of Bible in ministry from challenges arising in the classroom.

Teaching as scripted improv

This effort to create conditions in which students become active learners and the process a mutual one is both thrilling and risky because things happen in the moment; we make discoveries, we put forth arguments, we disagree, and we forget ourselves in those moments of conflict and insight that can be marvels of revelation. I think of teaching as a kind of carefully prepared improv, a set of events broadly scripted where I know the texts on which we are working, the direction in which we are headed, and what the building blocks are, but that begin with questions and tasks for students to plunge them into the mystery of meaning.

Teaching as multicultural conversation

As a teaching assistant in graduate school at Princeton Theological Seminary, I learned how to lead exegetical sessions in small groups, a fine form of adult learning. Students studied, read secondary literature, and wrote papers, and we worked together to discover *the* meaning. We never fully succeeded, of course, though usually a dominant opinion emerged. We were looking for that opinion, and I pushed toward it. But in my first postgraduate teaching position at Maryknoll School of Theology, a defunct Roman Catholic seminary and graduate school of foreign mission in Ossining, New York, something else happened. Meanings of a text exploded because of the international student population. The classroom was a stew of people from several continents, colors, and cultures before schools were trying to cook up such a stew in our classrooms. Caucasian American seminarians preparing for priesthood and mission life, lay students working for justice and peace, and foreign missionaries home on renewal, as well as students from host mission countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, sat in my classroom and formed a small, international, polyglot world.

These students did not care about many things I learned in graduate school, about origins of biblical texts, history of composition, oral traditions, questions of authorship, or JEPD.² Much of my graduate school material seemed abstract, abstruse, and ivory-towerish. What they wanted, what they searched for, was meaning, life, hope for their communities. They wanted to know how the text addressed their people in El Salvador and Guatemala, facing dictatorships and death squads in the 1980s. They wanted to know how the sacred books could be manna in the midst of famine in Ethiopia, or liberation for people living under Apartheid in South Africa, or comfort to themselves, fleeing persecution in the Sudan, or how the text could shape Christian identity among Hindus in India or Muslims in Bangladesh. There was among them an acute urgency in the search for meaning, life and death stakes, and a vivid faith that addressed me. And *à la* Borges, I was helplessly casting about looking for something to say back both to the text and to these hungry students.

The teaching problem was neither the text nor the critical methods and theories about the text; it was with my efforts to pass along dry material without appropriating it, translating it, or showing how it is filled with hope and fraught with meaning for them. So, for example, the documentary hypothesis is helpful for obvious reasons both to Enlightenment thinkers and to people

for whom *sola scriptura* is a major theological principle, as it explains so many problems in the text. But my predominantly Catholic students were not given to *sola scriptura* nor were they much concerned about authorship as literal dictation to a few divinely inspired authors. My challenge was to show why the Bible mattered at all. Why it matters continues to be the focus of my efforts in teaching and writing.

These students pushed me to think about how my critical knowledge might work theologically for them, to show that the text is a product of the people, that it emerges from experiences of God over centuries of struggle, that inspiration itself involved a quasi-democratic set of transmissions from generations of ordinary people who told stories in families, clans, and tribes, stories that others wrote down and changed in the face of new struggles, and that this is what pastors, preachers, teachers, missionaries, and believers have always done. I began to insist that the Bible arose from the people and belongs to the people, so let us together give it back to the people.

The students required that I think about how history of composition functioned to make meaning, that I look for the theological “so what” of our theories and how it is helpful for seeing their own vocations.

But something more happened to me at Maryknoll that would consistently affect my approach to texts and classrooms and radically modify my outlook on our field. When I began to do small group exegesis with my internationally diverse student population, the insights, conclusions, and appropriations of the text at which they arrived were profoundly different one from the other. I kept looking for primary overarching meanings of passages, but there were none.

Instead, there were startling insights that arose from their lived realities in conversation with the biblical passage at hand. From these students I learned what is now a given, a cliché, among postmodern practitioners of our discipline, although not evident in a lot of publications in our field—social location profoundly affects interpretation, and its corollary, texts function differently in different contexts.

Reading Amos, for example, in rich, relatively safe Westchester County, New York, makes it easy to underplay economic, political, and theological consequences of this prophet’s fiery speech, of God’s rejection of worship without justice, of God’s scorn for those who trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth. The context makes it necessary either to overlook or defend the violence of this God and easy to reduce the text to limp themes of divine justice and idealized forms of theological thinking, devoid of concrete realities of the lives of the homeless, the immigrant, the hungry, and the deprived among us on this planet. It makes it possible to ignore our complicity and our own hunger, homelessness, deprivation, and ways we have trampled and been trampled upon.

But to read the same words in Guatemala,³ or among the people of Haiti, or with immigrants crossing the border, yields different results, an intense search for hope in a God furious at massive injustice, at worship made false. When people are struggling to survive, when they are radically deprived of dignity, then the wrathful God of Amos becomes a word of life, a balm of Gilead, bread for the way. To such students I owe the nurturing of my own

faith. Although the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church continues to fail and disappoint and infuriate me in so many ways, these students showed me anew the depths of my tradition; they witnessed to me and called me to conversion to the Spirit of God at work in the world.

The teaching challenges at Columbia Theological Seminary, a Presbyterian-sponsored school in Decatur, Georgia, have taken a different shape. At this wonderful place, the Bible really matters. The question is how. Some students arrive bearing faith narrowly construed and with limited experience of the wider world. Many are Caucasian southern Protestant Christians. International and minority voices are not missing in the classroom, but only recently have they begun to form a critical mass. A new problem is how to bring the larger world into the classroom.

Columbia has made important institutional moves in this direction. One of my explicit efforts takes the form of a course called Intercultural Readings. One of the course's goals is to demonstrate how contexts illumine texts so that we might discover how our contexts both illuminate and blind us. I try to find several readings of the same passage from different parts of the world and alternative realities to show the mystery of meaning making. Students are receptive, saying they understand texts, God's work in the world, and even themselves better, but the effort seems to have real sticking power only when there are enough participants in the course from different cultural, racial, and national contexts. That is because testimonies of lived life, insider witness, offered in a community of trust have power to change hearts and minds; at least so it seems to me. Less successfully, I try to bring some of this polyglot interpretation into my writing.

Scholarship and writing for the people

In Borges's terms, I think of scholarship and writing as something to say back to the biblical text and, I want to add, something to say to students, churches, the world, the individual, and myself. I want to keep all these audiences somehow together in my writing. I want to overcome dualisms of the personal and the social, the local and the global, the critically reasonable and the emotional. I want my writing to be grounded in our technical knowledge but to express it clearly, in jargon-free terms, and to give it to the people. Next I talk about my struggles with writing, my conflicted relationship with historical criticism, my sense of text as art, and then turn to my abiding interest in the functions of texts.

Writing as struggle

I started biblical studies with questions about how the Bible makes meaning in our world, because I want meaning. In the pain and joy of my life I want meaning, illumination, love. I write from my life, my struggles, my need for God. It is so difficult for me to write—I cannot be melodramatic enough to tell you how hard I find it—but I cannot do anything else and be satisfied with what I produce. I find research exhilarating—working on texts, translating, and thinking about them, reading what others have to say—but then I write

to discover what I think, and I write to put structure to my thought. I usually begin with a two-sentence hunch, often derived from something I have read outside the field, and now I have to convert that hunch into a twenty-five-page essay or a two-hundred-page book. I have to find my own words, and I have to find my own way, and as Walter Brueggemann said to me one day when I was stuck in the mud, you just have to write your way through it. That's what I do: it takes me forever.

I try not to make myself the explicit subject of my writing except as an occasional site for theorizing about a text such as I sought to do in my book on Lamentations and some essays, and then I try to move from there into the larger world. The work is not just about me, but if it does not finally resonate and echo within me, then I do not see how I can offer words about how texts resonate with lives of others or with the work of ministry. But when I do write this way, when I connect texts to personal experiences, some readers express gratitude, as if we have met in some deep place through words on a page.

In my scholarship and writing I am trying both to uncover and to connect with human experiences of the divine, with God's absence and presence, with sufferings and fears, surprise, and delight of "others entangled in the flesh."⁴ Recently, I have become clearer about what I have always been trying to do. I try to discover how a text might have functioned, not simply what it says or how it says it, but how it worked in its ancient context. I find there a rich place for contemporary hermeneutical reflections. This self-awareness happened because I became an enthusiast for trauma and disaster, an excited and happy interrogator of catastrophe, a cheerleader for cataclysm! But first I need to speak of my ambivalent relationship with historical criticisms.

No to historical criticisms

Partly prompted by a few years of teaching undergraduates at Providence College in Rhode Island, I took up doctoral studies in search of the "so what" of our technical labors. But there was little room at the time for such questions, dominated as our field was by scientific frames of reference and practices of objective analyses. The personal, intuitive, artistic, and theological were mostly excluded from or compartmentalized away from our real work. I now caricature this mode of study as our "proofiness,"⁵ our Western, historical, scientific proofiness. I worked mightily to fit into this soul-silencing, "proofy" world, but there was no room in the inn. Denise Levertov expresses something similar about her study of poetry: she says that she "rejected the kind of criticism which treats works of art as if they were diagrams or merely means provided for the exercise of analysis rather than testimonies of lived life."⁶

The text as art

My scholarly liberation began when I read Walter Brueggemann's review of three major historical critical commentaries on Jeremiah in which he said of them, "the church deserves more."⁷ I survived in our field by reading feminist scholarship that directly addressed my life and by moving more fully into synchronic readings and literary criticisms, because they create space for aesthetics, for access to the text as theological art.

I study and write trying to expose the beauty of the literature, its symbolic meanings, potency of expression, emotional and intellectual appeals, and testimonies about God. I believe this work has huge ministerial implications because, as Louis Stulman puts it, “art has the power to evoke within us hope and to unmask our illusions and petty idols . . . all by beauty, words, symbol.”⁸

Yes to historical context

But I do not believe literary analysis alone is enough for church and world. If the text is theological art, it is also an ancient historical document that addresses historical crises that are not ours. To be an ethical interpreter, I still believe we need tools of historical criticism—perhaps a “chastened” historical criticism, as John Barton proposes.⁹ We need these tools because the text is culturally distant from us in time, place, language, customs, and worldview. I like to personify the biblical text as a stranger, culturally distant from us no matter how we have domesticated it in believing communities. To study the Bible—is it not something like a contemporary encounter between cultures, something like all of us traveling to Myanmar and not understanding much of what we meet there?

I think the enduring contribution of historical criticism to the work of church and the life of faith today is its insistence on the text’s otherness. A major problem for me in writing is, of course, how to present this material in ways that are readable, digestible, and even appealing to pastors, lay people, anyone beyond colleagues in the academy to whom I am also writing, maybe even primarily writing. When I write I try to bear in mind another mantra that I gleaned from a Society of Biblical Literature presentation by Marcus Borg who enjoined those who would write for a larger audience: “Don’t dumb it down; clarify it up.” Easier said than done, I find.

Functions of texts

This is what I now know I have always been looking for in my scholarship: the frisson, the quivering energy created by the text as work of art as it intervenes in its historical situation. I both deduce and imagine how it operated, what it sought to do, how it functioned to persuade its ancient audience in the midst of crises of life and faith. Of course, I am guessing and imagining, intuiting what that might have been, but I hope on solid grounds. In these efforts, I find fruitful pastoral dimensions for ministry, for preaching, for theology.

This is where my enthusiasm for violence, trauma, and disaster comes to the fore. My predilection for disaster begins with another impasse in a classroom at Columbia Seminary. Some Doctor of Ministry students rejected the book of Jeremiah because they said the book is toxic for modern believers, awash in “terrors all around” and dominated by a sexist God who casts off his wife and blames the people for disasters that befall them. Jeremiah is fire and brimstone writ large, they said. I agreed. What to do?

Happily, Daniel-Smith Christopher’s work on Ezekiel pointed me in the direction of trauma and disaster studies.¹⁰ Trauma and disaster studies is a loose, interdisciplinary investigation of the effects of violence upon individuals and societies. When I plowed into this literature, Jeremiah’s harsh rhetoric appeared in a different light.¹¹ Here are two samples. First, traumatic violence

typically takes away victims' abilities to speak about what happened to them. Violence so overwhelms their senses that they cannot take it in as it happens. Instead, violence imprints itself in the mind as fragments of the events. It shuts down speech and turns people mute even as violence keeps recurring. To survive, victims need to find ways to speak about the violence, to name it in ways that do not retraumatize them.

Jeremiah's violence mirrors the experiences of Judeans during the Babylonian Period. It creates language to talk about military assaults and the fears and losses that accompany them, but it does it indirectly, through the realm of art, poetry, symbol, and myth. The invading Babylonian army becomes the mythic "foe from the north" who assaults another mythic figure, the Daughter of Zion, Jerusalem portrayed as a woman. From this point of view, Jeremiah's violence functions as a pastoral intervention; its horrors are symbolic theater that sets actual warfare just at the edge of vision, close enough to help victims recall the original experience but distant enough to protect them from being plunged again into the violence.

A second typical effect of disasters and violence is the destruction of faith in God, who did not protect them. The traditions failed and the nation's survival is at stake. This is why, as often noted, Jeremiah is a theodicy. The believing community flounders without a rudder in a world overtaken by chaos. The book keeps God alive in this historical context by insisting that God, not Babylonian deities, is the one who brought the destruction, the one who sent the foe from the north, the one who punishes Judah rather than abandoning it. Violent features of the book that cause waves of problems for Western readers functioned in ancient Judah as a form of pastoral care, as practical theology, as therapeutic intervention in the aftermath of overwhelming catastrophe. Jeremiah's fire and brimstone is a survival tactic because it provides language to speak of unspeakable experience and insists that, tenderly or furiously, God remained connected to the people.

And this brings me back to the text as stranger. Jeremiah's violent God is culturally conditioned speech, ad hoc theology, or as Robert Frost said about poetry, "a temporary stay against confusion."¹² My attention to how the text functions clarifies my thinking about theology. The Bible's language for God is culturally conditioned speech. Why is the Bible's speech about God to be received as metatruth, freed of the limitations of historical, cultural life? Are claims about God less limited by contexts than by ancient customs? Most of us readily acknowledge that practices of slavery, polygamy, stoning — just to name a few — are particular to the ancient world and morally repugnant in our own. But when it comes to portraits of God, are we willing to acknowledge that these too are culturally conditioned? I want to emphasize that biblical portraits of God are equally conditioned. Maybe because I am a Catholic, I am not happy with theological reflection that treats the text as abstract themes, as if it contained universal statements of the truth and literal statements about the nature of the divine. I think modern atheists operate in precisely that interpretive fashion.

My study of Jeremiah's violence suggests that we should neither eliminate such texts from contemporary theological reflection nor run from them. Should not preachers and teachers consider how Jeremiah's violence worked for its au-

dience to discover how the text might speak to faith communities now? What if the present community is not in a life and death crisis? How can it address us? The texts have their own evocative capacities, but critically appreciated, they can mirror contemporary struggles in individual and communal life and offer a lens for seeing violence's effects among us. They can push us toward forming our own theologies of God's presence here and now, and, at the very least, they can help us consider the plight of neighbors around the globe.

This plunge into disaster raises a major dilemma of contemporary biblical studies and theological education. How can we address our own realities and also speak across them to one another? I write about these things in only a few of my essays. I tell of my excitement at becoming a feminist biblical interpreter, of the insight and energy feminism provided me, how it explained my life and my mother's and grandmother's, the hope it created, the theological insight it offered. Then women of color began to tell white women that we were doing to them what had been done to us, interpreting as if our middle class, privileged lives created the new normal of human life, as if now the text's real meanings were exposed because white women had finally been let into the guild. But with the emergence of voices of African American, Latina, and Asian women, suddenly the conditions from which women read biblical texts appeared far more complex, challenging our interpretations and revealing our privilege, our blindness, our own totalizing impulses, revealing again that our God is God of all Peoples.

I can only write for my context, but I do not know what my context is until I hear from women and men from different interpretive communities, nor can I respect the integrity of the text in its strangeness. To do my work now, I need postcolonial studies, empire studies, and interpretations from other nations to show me the text, to show me myself, and to awaken me to God's new work in the world.

I believe this is most urgent and also involves hard slogging, since there are many systemic reasons why such interpretations are difficult to find. But I need to find them, engage them, challenge them, and be challenged by them. This is urgent, not for pragmatic reasons such as to keep our shrinking institutions alive by finally including others. It is urgent for our own sake, for our conversion, to show us meanings we hardly envisioned, so that our hearts may burn within as we recognize the strangers and divine Stranger with whom we share the table of life.

This intercultural work has been going on for a while among us; it involves our displacement from some imaginary center. This is where the new frontiers of biblical studies rest in my opinion and where we are called to go, not out of fear that we will be eclipsed by the vibrant, burgeoning of faith and interpretations in the Two Thirds World, but because the Spirit of God is doing something new and calls us to live differently, to relate differently, in humility that enables us to see and hear, not just tell. How can we not participate in this conversation as theological educators preparing students for ministry in a world mightily altered at home and abroad?

Conclusions

Being a theological educator has been for me to participate in a community effort. I have been supported and challenged by an extraordinary community of scholars and teachers. There is a long list of female theologians who have been companions and courage providers. There has been a yearly gathering of Roman Catholic Old Testament scholars who meet for a weekend in a monastery to critique one another's papers. There are Jeremiah scholars, especially Louis Stulman and Pete Diamond, friends and collaborators with whom I have learned so much so that we hardly know where which of us said what. And there has been an amazing collegiality at Columbia Seminary. Team teaching, faculty book group, and dean's lunches have provided venues for working out our lives as theological educators across disciplines. Marcia Riggs reminds us all that everything that happens in the classroom is formation, for good or ill. And then there has been the extraordinary companionship of working, groaning, and laughing, laughing, laughing with my biblical colleagues: Stan Saunders, Beth Johnson, David Bartlett, Charlie Cousar, and Bill Brown. But of this group two have been the most influential for me: Christine Yoder is a star, and Walter Brueggemann has inspired me from the first time I read an article by him. I offer this talk in his honor.

My thanks again to ATS for this opportunity to gather up the fragments of my work and see what a feast it has been. And finally, my thanks to you. I do not intend to present my work as a model. Although I express my opinions emphatically, I understand them as a set of questions to you. How do you do theological education? Why do you do it? How can we do it better?

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ENDNOTES

1. Words of Rivka Glachen, "Pleasure Island," *The New York Times Book Review*, June 27, 2010: 23.
2. A form and redaction critical approach to the Pentateuch that argues four distinct authors constructed the work; J=Yahwist, E=Elohimist, D=Deuteronomist, P=Priestly.
3. See, for example, R. Daniel Carroll, *Contexts for Amos: Prophetic Poetics in Latin American Perspective* and *Amos—the Prophet and His Oracles: Research on the Book of Amos* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).
4. From "On Prayer," a poem by Czeslaw Milosz, http://www.poetryconnection.net/poets/Czeslaw_Milosz/15343.
5. Although Charles Seife never says so explicitly, his book title *Proofiness* alludes to "truthiness," a term popularized by Stephen Colbert in the first episode of *The Colbert Report*.
6. Denise Levertov, *New and Selected Essays* (New York: New Directions, 1992), 21.
7. Walter Brueggemann, "Thick Criticism: Thin Interpretation," *Interpretation* 42, no. 3 (July 1, 1988): 268–80.

8. Louis Stulman (private email, October 10, 2010).
9. John Barton, *The Nature of Biblical Criticism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007).
10. Daniel Smith Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile, Overtures to Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).
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12. Robert Frost, "The Figure a Poem Makes," in *Collected Poems of Robert Frost* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1939).

Honoring the Body: Nurturing Wellness through Seminary Curriculum and Community Life

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ABSTRACT: Honoring the body as a practice of faith is a vital discipline for seminarians. The national dialogue on clergy health challenges theological education to address wellness, while the growth of churches engaged in ministries of health calls for clergy who theologically and personally understand the connection between faith and health. A case study is offered of the wellness initiative in one Protestant seminary to prepare students who understand the personal, congregational, and communal implications of the relationship between faith and health.

Life-affirming practices for pastoral sustainability

Life-affirming practices introduced in seminaries—nourishing physical, mental, and spiritual well-being—can be key in helping new clergy thrive. In addition to learning the subjects undergirding ministry, seminarians need to begin learning a way of living that will sustain them as pastors. The churches they will serve need leaders equipped in care of both congregation and self so both pastor and ministries can flourish. Often minimized or ignored in curriculum and community life, a theologically grounded perspective on health and wellness is called for in seminary education today.

As an embodied religion in which God became flesh, Christianity has an inherent interest in the human body. A compelling theological perspective on self-care is offered by Stephanie Paulsell in her book *Honoring the Body*. As a Christian practice of faith, honoring the body affirms “that God created our bodies good. That God dwelled fully in a vulnerable human body. That in death God gathers us up, body and all. That through our bodies we participate in God’s activity in the world.”¹ Christian tradition has a varied history with the body, ranging from the disengagement of Gnosticism to the commitment to care for the ill. Yet at its roots are scriptural images evocative of self-care such as being fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps. 139:14) and offering our bodies as a living sacrifice to God (Rom. 12:1). A whole and healthy person is described in the Shema (Deut. 6:4–5) in the command to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.² Faith in God engages one’s whole being; for Christians, body-mind-spirit connections central to contemporary holistic health are firmly rooted in Scripture.

Secular as well as religious groups are interested in health. Nationally, a growing fitness culture contrasted with an increase in obesity and rising healthcare costs has focused attention on healthy lifestyles. This concern extends to denominations. Many are working to improve the health of clergy

while striving to sustain pastoral excellence, control health insurance expenditures, and minimize clergy attrition. Theological education, where pastoral identity and practices begin to form, can be a valuable partner in any effort to improve clergy health. Whether seminaries integrate or ignore health speaks to students of the relevance of self-care to ministry. In a learning environment where the life of the mind is highly valued, dualism can easily, if unintentionally, be encouraged where intellectual pursuits are valued at the expense of the body. Required courses as well as opportunities to exercise together, healthy eating at community events, and the rhythm of seminary life can all encourage practices of honoring the body.

This article discusses the conceptual framework and practical efforts of one Protestant seminary to use curriculum and community life in preparing clergy who understand the personal, congregational, and communal implications of the connection between faith and health. Grounded in academic and denominational health ministry programs, this seminary wellness initiative has been informed by the growth of the faith and health movement and denominational initiatives on clergy health. Considered together they create a conceptual framework supporting healthy seminary living.

Faith and health movement

The current interest in clergy health exists within the context of a faith and health movement that over the past twenty five years has (1) re-engaged the church in health and healing, (2) engaged congregations as partners in improving community health, and (3) studied the influence of religious and spiritual practices on health outcomes. The synergy of these combined elements contributes to the dialogue on seminary wellness and clergy health.

Issues of significance to contemporary churches are central to the preparation of future pastors. For example, clinical pastoral education recognizes the role pastors can play during illness. In addition to responding to the challenge of infirmity, health is also a subject of significant interest to congregations. The faith and health movement has inspired the development of wellness and caring ministries such as parish nurses, health ministers, lay health promoters, or health ministry teams, with many denominations offering resources to support the church's role in health and healing.³

The emergence of health ministries has brought stewardship of the body to the people in the pew. Historically, Christian tradition has focused on healing rather than on promoting health through establishing hospitals and offering services of healing. With a growing awareness of how well-being is influenced by religious practices, churches are also embracing health promotion fueled by growing resources in faith-based health education.⁴ Churches offer ministries of health because being healthy is a social value and also because health and healing are central to the mission of the church as reflected in the life of Christ.⁵ As seminarians prepare to provide pastoral leadership, their view on the relationship between faith and health may shape faith-based health practices for lay people as well as congregational ministries.

Congregations can not only positively influence the well-being of individuals but also partner to improve community health. Growing interest in collaborating with churches, synagogues, and mosques has led federal agencies, departments of health, hospitals, and community organizations to seek out religious partners. Recognizing that congregations are gathering points for large groups of people and that religion speaks to matters of health, partnerships are being initiated for health education, managing chronic illness, disease screening, and HIV/AIDS prevention.⁶ Pastors serve as gatekeepers for partnerships, and, as such, their viewpoint will be significant in determining if a church engages in health programs as a community outreach.

As congregations have been developing diverse ministries of health and wholeness, research exploring the connections between religion, spirituality, and health has grown with medical professionals at the forefront.⁷ Clergy with health literacy would also benefit this area of inquiry. Theological education would benefit from an integrated understanding of health just as medical education has been enhanced by integrating spirituality into its curriculum with support from the Templeton Foundation. The biomedical model common in our healthcare system focuses on physical well-being. To realize the possibilities for the church to be a place of health and healing, clergy are needed whose education recognizes a theological and personal connection between body, mind, and spirit.⁸

Clergy health: Nurturing well-lived pastoral lives

Congregationally based health ministries, community partnerships, and clinical research have all explored the association among religion, spirituality, and health. Set within a national context concerned about improving population health and controlling costs, clergy, as a group, have become the focus of health initiatives. A colloquium on clergy health held at Duke University in 2005 was aptly termed, “nurturing well-lived pastoral lives,” naming an appropriate goal for seminary wellness initiatives. With multiple denominations engaged in clergy health initiatives, this is an opportune time to consider health and human flourishing in seminary life.

Pastors share the health risks of the general population and also experience distinct challenges from unique work demands. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA), framing clergy health within the context of the church’s role in health and healing, was the first denomination to complete a comprehensive study on the health of rostered leaders and create resources for ministerial wellness. The ELCA study found a high incidence of stress and lifestyle-related conditions such as high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, depression, gastrointestinal disease, and neuromuscular disorders and identified clergy as one of the top professions to die from heart disease.⁹

On the positive side, attributes of healthy pastors were identified as good relationships comprised of supportive spouses and family structures; good relationships with their congregations; passion and vision for ministry; ability to handle stress and seek balance in life; recognition of boundaries, both personal and professional; ability to manage and be accountable; spiritual vi-

talities with a significant prayer and devotional life; a Lutheran sense of being called; fortifying relationships with mentors and colleagues; pursuit of life-long learning; feeling valued; taking vacations and sabbaticals; and having a good sense of humor.¹⁰ This epidemiological work, which could have been done in any work environment, was preceded by the theological work of the Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee on Ministerial Health and Wellness resulting in "A Letter on Peace and Good Health" by James Wind, calling the whole church to a life of health and wholeness,¹¹ and the Wholeness Wheel, a graphic representation of multiple facets of well-being.¹²

In the United Methodist Church (UMC), a task force report¹³ recognized the following as stressors influencing health: a decline in the societal status of clergy, expectations of 24-hour availability, pressure to function competently in multiple roles, lack of privacy, and being set apart from their community. "Loneliness among clergy has contributed to high dependence on prescription drugs, especially antidepressants. The stresses of conflicting expectations among congregations, pastors, and judicatories often lead to unhealthy patterns of behavior. By contrast, the discovery of vital friendships, a sense of fulfilling vocation, and rich Christian practices (including Sabbath-keeping) often are correlated with pastors attending to their health and receiving encouragement to do so."¹⁴

At a time when Congress is in the midst of health care reform, churches are faced with similar concerns. The UMC created a denominational health task force in 2004 to consider a unified health plan. Building on Wesleyan values and theology, the task force defined health as wholeness through and for God's mission; the clergy and the congregation were seen as having a responsibility to steward health, and the significance of responding connectionally was acknowledged, recognizing that more can be done in collaboration with God and others than can be done alone. Within this framework the pursuit of health is a means to an end rather than an end in itself. The task force concluded that the denomination should focus on improving the health of employees rather than on the cost of health care insurance. The Center for Health was created through the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits that has included collaboration with UMC seminaries.¹⁵ A corollary UMC effort supporting health ministries in congregations complements the clergy health initiative.

Other denominational efforts to improve clergy well-being have included the American Baptist Churches USA's program on "The Body Honors the Body" for national leadership and clergy wellness grants.¹⁶ The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod offers retreats for clergy and spouses focusing on holistic health.¹⁷ The Credo Institute completed a clergy wellness report for the Episcopal Church, finding health risks similar to those mentioned in the ELCA report. Framed in a theology of wellness, the report also found Episcopalian clergy ready to change health behavior and experiencing a high level of meaning and satisfaction in ministry. While recognizing the importance of individual health, the Credo study concludes that the well-being of the whole church is the major concern.¹⁸ The Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC), sponsoring denomination of our seminary, held a national conference in 2006 with

the theme of Sustaining Pastoral Excellence: Pastoral Wellness and regularly offers health screenings for pastors and spouses at national gatherings.

Looking at ministerial strengths, Meek and others studied resiliency, described as the ability to bounce back from adversity, in evangelical Protestant clergy. A general sample of pastors and those considered exemplars of emotional and spiritual health demonstrated that intentionally seeking to maintain a healthy balance, staying connected through mutually edifying relationships, and a vital spiritual life all contributed to personal resilience among clergy.¹⁹

While denominations differ in theology and polity, they share a common concern for clergy care and the preparation of future pastors. Being inviting rather than punitive, denominational initiatives can cultivate a social atmosphere in which self-care is valued and reinforced, creating a language, support, and structure that makes life-affirming choices such as healthy balance more possible than life-denying choices such as workaholism. Theological education can build on denominational efforts on clergy wellness. The church needs clergy prepared to thrive so that the church's mission in the world might be fulfilled. For the church, corporate stewardship includes attention to a healthy work environment where clergy can flourish as they serve. The support of both congregation and denomination are crucial in encouraging clergy well-being.²⁰

Where better to lay the groundwork for clergy to live well than in theological education? Subjects taught, as well as the rhythm of seminary life, influence opportunities for health. Scheduling of classes and assignments, challenging yet realistic expectations, food served at community events, and opportunities for physical activity can shape patterns of well-being. Valuing self-care must be facilitated in organizational life as well as verbalized. "This new movement to improve clergy health is about much more than just strapping on the Nikes. It is about creating and cultivating within the church a holistic approach to health that addresses wellness in all its physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions. At its best . . . this emphasis on clergy health raises important theological issues with the potential for reclaiming Christian practices about care of the self and one another."²¹ To reclaim the church's role in health and wholeness calls for culture change in denominations, congregations, and seminaries.

The responsibility of personal stewardship challenges clergy and seminarians to develop positive, life-affirming practices that integrate the multiple dimensions of well-being—spiritual, physical, emotional, social, intellectual, vocational, and financial. Kirk Byron Jones in his book *Rest in the Storm* suggests that lack of pastoral self-care is a form of personal violence, making it a critical topic to address in theological education. While healthy living is integral to discipleship for all Christians, for clergy, personal choices that influence health may also be reflected in the life of the church. Conversely, the health of the congregation as a system can also influence ministerial well-being.²²

Much attention has been given to clergy burnout and the challenges of ministry, yet identifying what enables clergy to thrive requires equal concern. This question is being explored nationally through the Lilly Endowment Inc. Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) program. The program provides funding to support the development and nurture of clergy. Sustaining pastoral ex-

cellence for today's churches challenges clergy to practice their faith through honoring the body, an attitude best introduced in the formative stages of professional development. If pastoral ministry engages the whole person, how then do we educate seminarians in body, mind, and spirit to serve the church?

Seminary wellness case study

The following case study offers an example of a wellness initiative in one Protestant seminary for the purpose of preparing clergy cognizant of personal, congregational, and communal implications of the connection between faith and health.

North Park Theological Seminary (NPTS) is the only seminary of the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC). Established in 1885 as the Mission Friends, the ECC has roots in the Lutheran Pietist tradition. The ECC is a rapidly growing multiethnic denomination with 800 churches domestically and additional ministry partnerships in nearly thirty countries. There is a strong history of attending to the well-being of others, with two hospitals, a dozen retirement communities, five enabling residences for adults with developmental disabilities, a strong international missions program, and a medical fitness center.

The ECC has been a recipient of a grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. in Sustaining Pastoral Excellence with an emphasis on character, competence, and constancy. The latter is described as faithfulness, longevity, and fidelity nurtured through a personal state of wellness—issuing out of a vital relationship with Jesus Christ and addressing a holistic perspective on health. Re-visioning retreats designed to renew friendship with God, reignite pastoral imagination, and explore one's call are used as one venue to encourage healthy patterns and habits of renewal.

The NPTS student population is 60 percent Evangelical Covenant with 40 percent from other denominations. Persons of color and international students make up 30 percent of the student body. Approximately 48 percent of the students are female. About 50 percent commute from the surrounding urban area, and the remaining 50 percent are residential, spending more time on campus and being more easily engaged in community life. The seminary also has a distance education program that serves students living around the country.

A collaborative venture in 1999 between the seminary and the denomination was established to equip leaders in health and ministry to integrate faith and health in clinical and congregational settings. Led by a seminary faculty member who is a nurse, this included creating academic programs, church workshops, conferences, and collaborations with denominational benevolent institutions. While a certificate in faith and health and a master of arts in Christian ministry with a concentration in faith and health are offered, the following discussion focuses on required courses for the Master of Divinity as the degree for people called to pastoral ministry.

Honoring the body in the curriculum

The requirements of curriculum communicate. NPTS's motto is "an education for your head, your heart, and your hands." Spiritual formation comprises the education for the heart. One required formation class is titled Embodiment, addressing spiritual issues in health and sexuality. Topics exploring how theology informs health practices include honoring the body, faith and food, faith and fitness, holism vs. dualism, body/mind interrelationships, when the body fails, healthy relationships, and creating an environment of health and wholeness. Each class includes an embodied activity such as a meditation on the body, reflective eating, exercise at the school fitness center, hand massage, and role plays. As a course requirement, students select a self-care discipline to engage in throughout the semester. Small group discussion and a final essay encourage students to reflect personally and theologically on self-care.

The education for your head is found in academic classes. Living Responsibly in the Realm of God (LRRG) is a required interdisciplinary ministry course integrating themes of justice, stewardship, and community health. While Embodiment addresses spirituality and individual health, LRRG addresses the communal responsibility for the health of others as an issue of justice and stewardship. Organized around the theme that "the health of each of us is related to the health of all of us,"²³ topics addressing how theology informs ministry in matters of community health include biblical perspectives on health and community, health and justice, access to health care, the church's role in promoting community health, creation care, and global health.

The schedule of elective classes also reflects valued areas of inquiry for students. A variety of classes communicates that the intersection between faith and health is a relevant area of study for ministry, including Spiritual Issues in Chronic Illness and Disability; Engaging Congregations in Ministries of Health; Faith, Health, and Community Development; Theology of Caring and Health; Christian Spirituality and Personal Health; Biblical Perspectives on Health and Healing; Ethics of Caring and Health; and Religion, Spirituality, and Health in Professional Practice. Faculty from health ministries, pastoral care, Bible, theology and ethics, spiritual formation, and the North Park University School of Nursing are involved in these classes, several of which are team taught. Regardless of whether students choose to take these classes, their existence in the curriculum speaks to their relevance in the life of the church. The curricular and cocurricular life of the seminary lays a foundation on which denominational initiatives in clergy health can build.

Honoring the body in community life

Community life as well as curriculum communicates values. What is given time, attention, and resources in seminary community life—such as guest speakers, forums, student groups, and thematic events—conveys what is deemed important. Integrating themes relevant to self-care in community life supports the relevance of honoring the body to theological education. In an attempt to do just this, NPTS created a wellness initiative to cultivate an environment where healthy lifestyle choices are valued and the connection between faith and health affirmed. The program, with initial funding through

a Practicing our Faith grant from the Valparaiso Project, focused on challenging seminary students to honor the body through developing and maintaining healthy habits. The emphasis was on inviting conversation rather than creating guilt for unhealthy behaviors.

A student focus group contributed to the project formation. Students identified diet and exercise as key to being a healthy seminarian, recognizing some unique challenges. Essential to a good diet were money to buy fresh produce and organic foods, access to transportation to reach the stores where healthier foods are available, and time to shop for and prepare food. One student suggested reclaiming the art of cooking as something foreign to many students.

Students viewed maintaining a schedule as vital to being physically active. Combining small group experiences with health-promoting activities, students thought, could help nurture a sense of community and provide efficiency for limited free time. Small groups sharing meals were suggested as a way to save time and encourage healthy eating. Exercise was seen as something that could be done in community in a seminary fun walk/run. Students recognized that doing activities such as eating together could benefit health and communicate the value of self-care for the seminary community. Thus emerged what was termed Faith, Food, and Fitness as an effort to cultivate a health-promoting environment within seminary community life, engaging students, families, faculty, and staff.

A fall emphasis on faith and food included a harvest dinner, serving healthy, locally grown foods and including a communal theological reflection; small groups meeting together for seven weeks to share food and a time of theological reflection; and a cooking class emphasizing healthy inexpensive foods. The workbook *Just Eating? Practicing Our Faith at the Table* by Jennifer Schrock provided the content for small group theological reflection. The student-led community organic garden also contributes to an awareness of healthy eating and communal stewardship. Housed in the yard of a seminary apartment, the garden embodies a healthy connection to the earth and our food. Produce is given to the local food pantry with a small amount sold to the seminary community.

The highlight of the faith and fitness emphasis was a "Walk to Jerusalem," a challenge to the entire community during Lent to collectively walk 6,205 miles, the same distance as between Chicago and Jerusalem. Pedometers were distributed, and more than fifty members of the seminary community participated through walking, running, biking, playing basketball, and using fitness equipment either in small groups or individually. A state of the art fitness facility enhanced our efforts at increasing exercise.

The walk began with a luncheon and group theological reflection on faith and fitness led by a member of the theology faculty who is also a certified trainer. Devotions written by students, providing theological reflection on the significance of honoring the body, were emailed weekly to the community and collected into a booklet. Students, faculty, and staff could be seen comparing mileage on their pedometers at coffee hour and in the halls. By Easter, the community had collectively walked 7,200 miles and celebrated this achievement with a Middle Eastern dinner.

The success of the Walk to Jerusalem, both in getting people to be more physically active and in providing opportunity for theological reflection, can be attributed to community engagement. The concept captured the collective imagination. Everyone in the seminary participated, if only through receiving the devotions and weekly reports of mileage accrued via email. This generated enthusiasm and a sense that physical activity was valued in the seminary.

The walk has been repeated as a biannual event with similar results. For some, increasing physical activity became a family or small group event that strengthened relational ties as well as the body. Participants explained the benefit in the following ways. One student spoke about the significance of being part of a group effort, recognizing that her miles alone could not get to Jerusalem but that by working together a goal could be achieved that one could not accomplish individually. Another participant who was a runner spoke of the motivation this event gave him to not let the team down. Connecting with the neighborhood in new ways through the discipline of walking was important to another student.

From this wellness initiative and continued curricular and cocurricular events, changes have been seen in food served at group functions, a heightened awareness of the value of physical activity, an appreciation for the importance of self-care for those engaged in ministry, and a greater understanding of the theological implications of food and fitness for individuals and communities. As we go forward, the challenge is sustainability when finances, personnel, or trends change. This can best be accomplished by continuing to weave themes of health in curricular and community life so it remains an integrated part of the whole fabric of seminary life rather than a competing agenda.

Conclusion

Wellness must not become part of the null curriculum in theological education rendered insignificant because of its absence. Healthy living based on accurate health information and sound theology needs to become an integral component of seminary life where the foundation is laid for nurturing well-lived pastoral lives. While there is much cognitive knowledge to acquire in seminary, experiences embodying the relationship between body, mind, and spirit are also important. Self-care encouraged in community life will help sustain students during seminary and later with denominational support through the rigors of ministry. What students learn about the connection between faith and health will enrich congregational life as it is shared with congregations in teaching, preaching, and pastoral care. Clergy who understand the biblical and theological challenge of the church to promote health and wholeness will be prepared to support congregationally based health ministries and participate in faith and health community partnerships. The whole church, not only clergy, needs to be attentive to honoring the body.

Mary Chase-Ziolek has been on the North Park Theological Seminary faculty since 1999 where she has been responsible for teaching and administering interdisciplinary programs in health ministry. She is also on the faculty of the North Park University School of Nursing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Partial funding for this project was provided by the Valparaíso Project.

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Faculty Vocation and Governance within a Consortium of Denominationally Accountable Seminaries

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ABSTRACT: Defining faculty vocation and involvement in governance within a consortium of denominationally accountable seminaries affiliated with a university requires careful attention to significant complexities and to the interactive operations of various overlapping domains. This article details some of that complexity, indicates some responses that have proven helpful, and summarizes some of the principles the Associated Canadian Theological Schools have discovered to be useful and essential to enable faculty to flourish and function well individually and collectively.

A recent issue of *Theological Education* (vol. 44, no. 2) presented results deriving from the Faculty Vocation and Governance project. Each of the articles and reports provides considerable insight into the various seminary worlds that dot the ATS universe. I have derived benefit from each contribution. Yet, as I reflected on this collection of articles, it became apparent that none considered specifically the complexity of faculty vocation and governance within a consortium of denominationally accountable seminaries, which also function collectively as a university graduate school of theology. When both consortial and denominational accountability blend together, complexities escalate. What is the vocation of a seminary consortium and what is a denomination's vocation? Furthermore, when a seminary consortium of denominationally accountable theological schools also functions as the graduate school of theology for a university, faculty vocation and governance questions achieve exquisite levels of theoretical and operational complexity. This paper seeks partially to address this gap and consider how faculty members define their individual and collective vocations as they teach within the concentric worlds of seminary, consortium, denomination, and university. As well, it reflects upon a faculty member's role when shared governance includes some measure of accountability to various interrelated boards and governance committees. In this I reflect the privilege I have had to participate for twenty-one years in the bold experiment known as the Associated Canadian Theological Schools (ACTS) of Trinity Western University (TWU) in Langley, British Columbia.

Canadian evangelical Protestant denominations tend to be numerically challenged, both in the number of churches and in the quantity of adherents. Yet, they feel strongly the responsibility to develop qualified ministry leaders. The limitation of resources, the huge geographical realities, and the costs of excellent graduate theological education conspire against each denomination developing and sustaining the capacity to operate its own seminary. These elements have led many Canadian church groups to develop seminary clusters

organized in various ways, so that they can afford to have strong voices in the development of ministry leaders.

In the mid-80s, several Canadian evangelical denominational groups realized that they could neither sustain current seminary operations nor hope to develop their own independent seminaries. So conversation began, hosted by Trinity Western University (TWU) and building on the relationship developed between TWU and Northwest Baptist Seminary (Langley, BC), and continued over several years, offering a one-year master's degree in ministry leadership development. The result of these conversations was the establishment of a consortium called the Associated Canadian Theological Schools. Initially three denominationally accountable seminaries, each affiliated with the university, formed the consortium. In this unique collaboration, each seminary member retains independent governance, administration, financial autonomy, degree-granting rights, faculty, and students. Students register both with the university and in one of the seminaries and graduate with a degree conjointly awarded by the university and the respective seminary. One curriculum exists, one library is supported, one admissions and registration process functions for the whole, one comprehensive budget funds these operations, and one facility is leased in which all the seminaries (now five) have their offices. Faculty members are employed by a member seminary, but each faculty person is approved by all the seminaries to teach in the common curriculum. Funding comes from tuition (pooled to support the consortium operations) and an institutional support grant that each seminary gives to the consortium annually. ACTS began in 1988 with twenty-seven students, and twenty-one years later, one thousand graduates have matriculated, five seminaries are working together, and eight graduate degree programs are offered. ACTS represents the fifth largest seminary operation in Canada.

The governance issues created by this integrated series of institutional relationships are certainly a challenge. We continue to reinvent ourselves and our ways of working together in order to respect the overlapping governance voices. TWU primarily oversees academic quality, requiring adherence to ATS standards, which address faculty standards, curriculum, and academic administration. However, the consortium has considerable latitude in how it chooses to carry forward its collective vision. Because each seminary is still an independent entity and continues to award degrees (the number of degrees varies among the seminaries) conjointly with TWU, they need to have a significant voice in academic matters to ensure their respective boards that academic quality is being maintained. Usually there is strong convergence between TWU's academic expectations and those desired by the seminaries, particularly because the whole operates within the world of ATS.

The oversight of the consortium lies in the hands of the Joint Governance Committee (JGC). Each seminary appoints three representatives to JGC, which meets three times a year. Although board-like in its purview, it only has authority as defined in the consortium agreement and thus is more limited in its scope than a usual seminary board because ACTS itself is not an independent entity. JGC is granted authority by TWU and the seminaries to develop and oversee operational policy for the consortium. This includes approval of the

ACTS vision and strategic plan, major curricular initiatives (i.e., new degree programs), evaluation of the ACTS principal/dean (under the general oversight of the TWU provost), and financial matters. These responsibilities are balanced carefully under the general governance of TWU and with constant attention to the governing authority that resides with each seminary. Decision making then has to proceed with deliberate care given to constant communication and engagement of all the necessary parties. Shared governance is alive, but the “shared-ness” includes multiple boards. It has to be nurtured constantly so that it remains healthy.

An additional complexity is that the academic ethos of each seminary—based on its own history, articulated mission and vision, and denominational connectivity—is unique. Three of the seminaries have their operations primarily integrated within the ACTS consortium. One seminary historically has linkage with denominational theological education located in the United States, as well as a teaching centre in Winnipeg. Another seminary is a formal unit of TWU because it serves the same denomination with which the university is formally linked.

Can a consortium of this nature have a corporate vocation, in distinction from the vocation of its individual seminary members and the university? We have sought to discern this and have tended to locate it in the context of Christ’s vision for the unity of his church while honouring the diversity that the Spirit has built into his body. The collective faculty strive to express this unity as they prepare ministry leaders to serve in specific denominations as well as to contribute to the advance of the whole Kingdom of God.

Faculty vocation

How does a faculty member navigate this complex academic environment vocationally? As employees, faculty members in the first place are directly accountable to one of the seminaries because a particular seminary has to hire them. This relationship creates the fundamental context for their vocational perspective. In the case of some seminaries, their educational mission extends beyond their location in the consortium. The faculty in a particular seminary must wrestle with and formulate their collective vocation just as in any other ACTS seminary setting. One difference is operative—the seminaries have on average only two or three faculty members who form one segment of the total consortium faculty.

Second, faculty members make commitments to teach and work collegially within the context of the consortium. This requires them to give attention to four other seminaries and their missions, interacting respectfully with their faculties and students. Teaching in the common curriculum normally brings faculty members into contact with students from each of the seminaries in multiple programs. A faculty member might be employed by a Baptist seminary but is responsible to instruct students registered in the Pentecostal seminary. Again, faculty members in any seminary work with students from diverse denominational backgrounds and must treat their church settings respectfully. However, it is different in ACTS in that the faculty members of one

seminary actually form part of the teaching faculty of another, denominationally accountable seminary.

Third, each seminary and TWU own the academic programs, and faculty function as part of each seminary's faculty system as well as the university's, fulfilling the university's mission through their curricular responsibilities. Faculty members must give attention to how their teaching enables the missions of the respective seminaries and the university to be fulfilled. Faculty persons in other ATS seminaries may hold joint appointments in two institutions, but few teach in programs that must contribute to the missions of so many different entities simultaneously.

The greatest challenge for faculty vocation in this environment is alignment. Keeping the educational visions of the seminary of employment, the other seminaries, the consortium as collective, and the university orbiting in good order requires constant conversation and reflection, as well as continual recalibration. For example, when considering a proposal to develop online educational opportunities, one seminary member in the consortium may not regard this as an adequate means of ministry preparation, whereas other seminary members may believe it is an essential means for mission fulfillment. Moreover, the university may have made online education an essential component in several of its other graduate programs. In such a situation, a faculty member may find considerable conflict in discerning an appropriate way to reflect the conviction of his or her seminary while also assisting the collective consortium faculty in fulfilling its vocation.

When faculty members exercise responsibility for the curriculum, they must continually ask whose curriculum they are engaging—their seminary's, the consortium's, or the university's. In reality it is all three simultaneously. For example, the consortium offers on behalf of the university the MA in Marriage and Family Therapy. However, not all of the seminaries in the consortium choose to confer this degree. A faculty person employed by a seminary that does not award this degree nevertheless has full voice in the consortium faculty meetings regarding this curriculum. When discussion ensues regarding this curriculum, for whom does the faculty person speak? The faculty have to figure out a way to oversee the curriculum so that the curricular requirements of all three entities in this network can be accomplished with excellence.

But that is not all, because the faculty have a denominational accountability for implementing a curriculum that develops ministry leaders who can lead churches well. At times faculty discern tension between these respective mission-driven forces. Finding the time and energy to work these things through to good resolution can be exhausting. However, we have found that practically speaking we can do this, but it requires continual trust, understanding, attention to process, and commitment to common values. Seminary leaders for their part must help faculty make sense of these collaborative relationships so that vocation is viewed wholistically and does not become frustratingly fragmented or dysfunctionally conflictive. This is particularly critical for new faculty.

A second challenge arises from multiple levels of accountability. When faculty members are evaluated as teachers, from which perspective is discern-

ment given—the individual seminary, the consortium, the university, or their denominational context? Does one perspective have priority over the others? Who manages this process? Which dean evaluates them—their seminary dean, the dean of ACTS, or the university's dean of graduate studies? Who ultimately decides what the evaluation report will recommend? We have resolved this issue by leaving faculty evaluation with the seminary of employment and by adopting common standards and practices that will inform the evaluation so that significant voices can speak into a faculty person's evaluation with the faculty person's full knowledge.

Third, faculty members struggle to define their roles. If you ask faculty members working in this consortial system what their role is, sometimes they will say "I work for Canadian Baptist Seminary (one of the consortium members)," or "I am a professor in ACTS," or "I teach at Trinity Western University in graduate studies," or "I equip ministry leaders for the Baptist General Conference of Canada." It is quite common for faculty members in ATS institutions to work in two overlapping worlds—their own seminary and denomination, or their own seminary and the university of affiliation. On rare occasions they might work in three worlds, but to make vocational sense of four diversely integrated systems creates severe complexity. When the faculty publish articles, one finds that they designate their professional context variously. When they are introduced to speak publicly, they are never sure how they will be identified and located. Their personal responses will often depend on the audience they are engaging.

In some cases a fourth issue is evident. Some of the faculty tend to be more engaged vocationally with an academic program than with a seminary, ACTS, the university, or a denominational context. For example, ACTS offered a professional counseling program for more than a decade and, in September 2009, initiated a transition towards a Master of Arts in Marriage and Family Therapy. Some faculty who teach primarily in this program may tend to identify themselves as faculty in the MAMFT program more often than as faculty at ACTS or faculty of a particular seminary.

So the question of faculty vocation in the ACTS context becomes difficult to define and complex to manage. The respective seminary deans have to work hard to help faculty make sense of these overlapping academic, professional, and vocational jurisdictions. The ACTS dean, who chairs the collective ACTS faculty, carries considerable responsibility in helping faculty develop personal and collective coherence regarding this issue. Presidents who desire to retain the faculty resources present within their seminaries must help their faculty understand this complex world so that faculty experience deep satisfaction and rich opportunities in their personal and professional callings. The university's dean of graduate studies must give diligence to the inclusion of ACTS faculty within the university's academic and other professional activities. Fortunately, ACTS has leaders who are giving attention to these matters and finding ways to respond to these challenges. Faculty turnover in the ACTS consortium has been extremely modest, which is one possible indicator that faculty sense their vocational lives are satisfying. Personally, the ability to serve vocationally in a specific denominational setting, while simultaneously

being part of a large, faculty-rich graduate school of theology attached to Canada's largest private Christian university, brings opportunity for vocational satisfaction at many different levels.

Faculty in other seminary settings will not have to cope with the complexity of so many multiple, institutional layers or overlapping domains. Understanding process and discerning the lines of authority, a standalone seminary has its own complexity, but the world of a university-based consortium of denominationally accountable seminaries requires faculty members to attune their ears to the voices of many stakeholders and define a sense of vocation that has sufficient elasticity and strength to enable the individual to flourish professionally and spiritually.

This world, while complex and diverse, is filled with amazing opportunities for faculty. For example, by working collaboratively with several faculty members in the university's graduate MA in Biblical Studies, several faculty members at ACTS have established the Institute for Septuagint Studies within the university. This would have been very difficult to accomplish in an independent Canadian seminary.

From the standpoint of seminary boards involved in ACTS, if faculty represent a key resource that they have responsibility to nurture and conserve, then these boards have to ensure that their presidents are aware of the complexities and are able to help faculty make sense of this networked, symbiotic, educational system.

Faculty voice in governance

The other question, related and not distinct, considers how faculty in the ACTS environment have voice in governance. The concept of shared governance is embraced within the consortium, as we seek to model the values that the ATS standards articulate. Normally, shared governance in a seminary will involve the board, the administration, the faculty, and the students. Within the ACTS consortium this "shared-ness" encompasses multiple boards (both seminary and university), multiple administrations, and multiple faculty groups. The shared-ness of the governance expands in various ways.

Parallel governance structures exist in the individual seminaries, in the consortium, and in the university. Because shared governance (board or quasi-board, administration, and faculty) is operative in all three spheres, then faculty must learn how to negotiate its governance role in each of these distinct, but related contexts—seminary, consortium, university. How its voice is expressed may be different, depending upon the context. Academic administrators must help faculty achieve clarity about its voice and its appropriate expression, individually and collectively, in each of these contexts.

Helping faculty to understand the various governance structures and navigate the interrelated academic landscapes requires constant attention. The more faculty talk about it, usually the greater the clarity that emerges. So we have to keep telling our story to one another. Academic administration cannot assume that faculty or other parties in the shared governance ethos comprehend the structures and processes in the same way. In most cases the

diverse articulations of faculty (individual or as a specific seminary faculty group) arise for quite legitimate reasons and tend to get resolved or integrated through continued communication. However, each party has to be working in good faith for the whole to operate well and achieve necessary consensus. We still struggle to discern how to proceed when consensus becomes elusive.

The respective seminary deans and the ACTS dean carry significant responsibility to assist faculty in defining the pathways for decision making. They also have to be diligent in maintaining the academic processes with integrity. Conflict tends to arise when process is not observed or is perceived to have been disregarded. Historically when the pathway to decision is clear, the consortium faculty is able to make a decision in a timely fashion, just as expeditiously as a single seminary entity. For example, the ACTS faculty recently worked through revisions to the MDiv program in the space of ten months. In a standalone seminary, the pathway for decision making normally will be more clear and straightforward, and less time will have to be devoted to developing collective clarity and agreement about process.

Definition is evolving of what areas the collective faculty has voice in and how that voice is given expression. Because five seminaries, the consortium as a whole, and the university are all involved in these matters, and each is developing in its own way and for diverse reasons, most academic arrangements are in a constant state of flux. Sometimes faculty members have some control of these fluctuations, but on other occasions they are observers who, though affected by the outcomes, do not have direct voice in the decisions. For example, the university recently made the decision to establish a senate. The ACTS faculty as a whole was not asked whether it agreed that such a body should be established. However, after the university made its decision, ACTS faculty was given voice in designing some aspects of its structure and the right to vote in the senate elections. Because the university decided to take this academic decision, it has implications for the academic decision pathways that ACTS must employ as the graduate school of theology. Changes in one part of the system often have unintended consequences on other segments. Because everyone is not equally aware of all the complexities, these changes can create significant issues. It requires constant communication and goodwill. Perhaps, then, one of the significant differences for ACTS faculty is that complex institutional relationships mean that it cannot always be as directly involved in academic decisions as faculty in a standalone seminary might be. The collective faculty has to exercise its academic responsibility through appropriate policy and delegation.

For faculty to exercise appropriate oversight of the entire curriculum, it is necessary to delegate responsibility to smaller program committees. Faculty persons/deans who lead these committees must give attention to the consortium vision, as well as the respective seminary/denominational family needs and the larger vision of the university for developing graduate studies. These committees must be prepared to demonstrate that recommended changes are good for the whole and for the parts. Conversely, having the opportunity for five seminaries and their faculties to evaluate curricular proposals brings into these discussions significant experience, wisdom, and competence—something that is not always available in the same measure in independent Cana-

dian seminaries. Conversely we have to be careful not to make decisions based on consensus driven by the lowest common denominator.

Finding appropriate balance so that one governance structure is not working in opposition to another, thus dividing faculty loyalties, is an ever-present concern. The pathways to decision regarding curriculum must give time for individual seminary approval processes to operate without dictating how such processes must proceed. In addition, the university's graduate academic council must approve major curricular initiatives, and each proposal must follow the university's template. Although tending to these various levels of approval and review can be tedious and sometimes frustrating, the strength is that many eyes vet each proposal. If differences emerge, then time is taken to find good ways to resolve them. We have a deep respect for the various seminary cultures and that of the university when it comes to faculty voice.

Conclusion

What is necessary for faculty vocation to flourish and for faculty role in governance to function well? We have found the following principles significant:

1. Faculty agreement on the strength and value of the *agape* principle (i.e., what is good for one seminary will be good for the whole and visa versa) is important.
2. Constant, consistent, transparent communication is critical if a faculty community is to be sustained.
3. Careful commitment to approved process that gives good value to shared governance and fixing it when it is broken or fails requires humility and determination to get it right. In this we honour the value of each seminary unit and its faculty voice.
4. Sense-making and education about the nature of the ACTS Consortium requires continual conversation, resulting in fierce conversations at times. We have to keep people aware and situated on the map in the right place, working with a coherent vision/strategic plan. This involves a careful stewardship of knowledge and understanding.
5. Conflict resolution forms a significant part of the skill set of the ACTS dean and each seminary dean.
6. We must trust one another and listen well. If we are faithful and attentive here, then most other elements function remarkably well.

Faculty vocation within ACTS, the University Graduate School of Theology, and the member seminaries does flourish. Shared governance is alive and functions well in most cases. Twenty-one years of kingdom-work, prayer, worship, and scholarly endeavor together has taught us many things. Perhaps the most treasured of these learnings is the wonderful witness of serving Christ in unity.

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Seminaries, Congregations, and Clergy: Lifelong Partners in Theological Education

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ABSTRACT: The previous two decades reflect challenges, changes, and creative developments in clergy education. Initial responses to projected clergy shortages included renewed recruitment efforts, changes in seminary curriculums, and renewed emphasis on practical experience during the preservice educational phase. These developments led to a new phase in clergy education, the inductive phase, as the Transition into Ministry initiative rose to offer residential education for seminary graduates. This article proposes an elective classification for Congregational Engagement that would enable these trends to create lifelong partnerships with seminaries and congregations.

Introduction

Theological schools during the closing two decades of the twentieth century “engaged in a significant and extended reappraisal of the fundamental aims and purposes of theological education as a whole.”¹ During recent decades, challenges in theological education have included projected clergy shortages coupled with declining enrollments, critiques claiming graduates are not fully prepared for the practical ministry requirements of local congregations, and reports on waning interest in the profession of congregational ministry. Many subsequent reports and studies have sought explanations for projected clergy shortages, decreased enrollments, and the gap in moving from the academy to practice.

With roots extending back to 1636 and the establishment of Harvard, clergy education in North America is by no means a new endeavor, and the religious and societal issues that have influenced the theological training of ministers have a similarly far-reaching history.² The attitude expressed in Ecclesiastes may well apply: “there is nothing new under the sun” (1:9b, NRSV). However, the challenges of recent decades have given rise to renewed efforts in recruitment, revisions in curriculum design, and renewed engagements with congregational contexts. For example, significant innovative approaches have occurred in the transition from seminary education to congregational practice. This intentional period of learning in practice, most evident in pastoral residency programs, serves as an inductive phase of theological education. The effectiveness of this phase confirms my long-held personal belief that the relationship between the seminary and the congregation should be more than a deposit-and-withdrawal transaction. An ongoing engagement between congregations and seminaries would establish a two-way approach combining education and practice in a manner benefitting all involved.

My interest in and passion for this subject rest on both professional and personal motives. I have served in the local church for more than twenty years as an ordained clergy leader, participated in peer learning groups and professional groups, and served as an adjunct instructor in the seminary setting. These experiences and the stories shared by colleagues offer me personal insight into the formative power that exists within congregations. I have listened to stories of colleagues who struggled with exiting their profession early, and witnessed some who did so. I have heard young seminarians consider noncongregational settings as their preferred avenue of ministry career. Additionally, I have worked as a colleague with other recent seminary graduates. The intersection of my experience, personal interest, and study of the trends and developments in clergy education leads me to propose an elective classification for theological schools that would identify them as having a confirmed, formal, and active engagement with congregations, an engagement that would serve to build a foundation for lifelong partnerships of seminaries, congregations, and clergy.

The future of clergy education and practice of ministry depends on seminaries and congregations to continue efforts of innovation, creativity, forging new relationships, and establishing systems of support and accountability for keeping pace with the ongoing challenges in theological education. I am proposing a strategy that would deepen and extend the partnership of seminary and congregation, and provide for strength, support, and continued learning and development of clergy beyond the initial formative years of seminary, or preservice theological education, and the inductive phase of clergy education. My proposal is a Congregational Engagement elective classification for theological schools committed to combining the practical skills of ministry with the academic pursuits of theological education that would serve to strengthen the partnership of seminaries with congregations and the value of seminaries for congregations.

The case and context

Reports emerged in the late twentieth century pointing to signs of clergy shortages.³ Awareness and interest in this trend spread among teachers and administrators in theological schools and among denominational leaders responsible for providing congregations with clergy leadership. The Pulpit and Pew, the Alban Institute, and the Auburn Center for Theological Education published reports, articles, and books chronicling the declines, identifying possible contributors, and offering insights and recommendations. Congregational demands—including blurred boundaries between personal and professional time, unrealistic expectations due to the demand for filling various roles, and confusing evaluation standards—were cited as contributing factors that were “widespread across denominations and faith traditions.”⁴ Fewer young people were considering a professional clergy career in leading mainline churches,⁵ with reports that less than 60 percent of the students planned to be ordained.⁶ Mainline Protestants saw their ministries as traversing an uncertain and tumultuous period with declining numbers in the recruitment ranks,

seminarians who did not wish to serve in the local church, and a profession that was now failing “to attract the brightest and best.”⁷

The 2005 survey conducted by the Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education in cooperation with The Association of Theological Schools reported that “interest in congregational ministry increases during seminary,” and “more graduates enter congregational ministry than say they plan to before graduation.”⁸ However, other findings revealed the tenuousness of this positive trend. The report revealed that 20 percent of graduates involved in noncongregational ministry and 25 percent of those serving in congregations indicated they wished to do something different in their next position. Becky McMillan identified similar trends and stated that “there appears to be a declining number of seminary graduates seeking ordination to serve local churches as well as a growing number who drop out of pastoral ministry in the early years of ministry.”⁹

The existing gap between seminary and congregation

During the 1980s and 1990s, theological schools considered alternatives and innovations in the preparation of clergy and engaged in revisions and reappraisals of the aims and purposes of theological education.¹⁰ Historically, learning in theological schools has been intended for two different uses, “either professional ministry or academic mastery,”¹¹ reflecting the ongoing perception of theory and practice as separate rather than integrated. This persistent lack of integration is reflected in a theory-to-practice gap in moving from seminary to congregation, a gap that has received attention for more than a hundred years.¹² Interestingly, at the turn of the twentieth century, seminaries were challenged to train individuals to “lead a church in a changing social order,”¹³ a view that advocated practical experience as an integral part of training and education. Emphasis was renewed in the early 1940s with the claim that a student’s practical experience outside the seminary proper was an integral part of the training and education.¹⁴ Debate over the place of the practical in the seminary curriculum culminated in 1962 when The Association of Theological Schools approved new accreditation standards for theological schools that required field education.¹⁵

However, the conversation on further integrating practical skills into the seminary curriculum continues. Daniel Aleshire, executive director of The Association of Theological Schools, encourages seminaries to continue to make room for the disciplines of practice in the curriculum.¹⁶ Claiming that the “disciplines of practice radically alter how the theological content is organized,” Aleshire speaks to a need for students “to have greater exposure to the environments that facilely teach” the kind of learning that the classroom does not readily allow.¹⁷ Rather than being a gap or void in educational preparation, the interstice between the practical preparation and the theoretical/theological foundations for ministry provides a useful tension. When this distinction is viewed as a healthy tension in which the balance can shift as contexts and scholarship change, congregations and institutions can both benefit from students’ experience of these complementary aspects of clergy education.

Another development in the integration of the practical dimensions of ministry in the academic disciplines of theological education is a renewed approach to practical theology. Practical theology moves curricular design and theological education beyond seeing practice as application of theory. Practice becomes integrated with theory in theological education instead of being viewed as the opposite to theory, an afterthought, or the “application of prior systematic understandings.”¹⁸ As “an inherently interdisciplinary quest, engaging the full range of theological disciplines,”¹⁹ practical theology works toward grounding “our ways of knowing and learning in our practices, such that theology itself becomes an ongoing practice.”²⁰ Terry Veling suggests that theological education is held accountable by practical theology to “attend to the ‘signs of the times,’ to bring tradition and contemporary culture into a mutually creative dialogue.”²¹ Congregational Engagement continues the movement of integration of theory and practice, knowledge and experience, reflective of the theoretical framework of practical theology. Congregational Engagement would also demonstrate that the aspiration toward the concept of practical theology had actually been put into action by the institution.

Connecting with congregations during preservice education

Supervised field experience has found its way into the curriculum, along with the integration of theory and practice. How these take shape remains an evolving endeavor in the education and training of seminary students. Recent studies and reports recognize educational fieldwork as both necessary and foundational within the pedagogy of ministerial education. The Association of Theological Schools in 2005 published a supplemental issue of its journal, *Theological Education*, including articles reporting on different theological schools that have engaged in projects funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. that link the seminary educational experience with congregational contexts. John Dreibelbis and David Gortner concluded in their report on adopted curricular changes at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary that congregations can be and are environments that teach students, and that this recognition has been integrated into the curriculum.²² From their two-year experience through Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary that engaged clergy and lay people in discussions with faculty at the seminary, Gary Peluso-Verdend and Jack Seymour concluded that “in order to teach faithfully and prepare leaders, the seminary needs to learn from and seek to engage in partner ministries with transforming, missional congregations.”²³ Furthermore, the partnership and collegiality between the seminary and local congregations is necessary in the training and preparation of seminarians. Randy Nelson, reporting on strategies that Luther Seminary developed to address the inclusion of congregational contexts in its theological curriculum, described the value of involvement in contexts outside the classroom in the preparation of students. This was considered a model of “preinternship contextual education” and was incorporated into the degree requirements for the master of divinity.²⁴

Nonetheless, curricular adaptations, reports and research studies, and emphasis, though bringing improvements, have neither eliminated nor bridged this gap in transitioning from seminary to congregation. The existence of such

a gap, however, does not preclude well-educated clergy.²⁵ Thomas Long, in fact, says that the gap between seminary and the practice of ministry ought to exist, because “negotiating it well is one of the marks of faithful ministry.”²⁶ Furthermore, good ministry is found “where pastors stand with one foot firmly planted in their theological education and the other foot just as firmly planted in the parish, and allow the resulting tension to shape their pastoral practice.”²⁷ Much of what is necessary in the learning of pastoral ministry “can only be learned in the practice of pastoral ministry.”²⁸ The initial years of ministry, David Wood concluded, serve as an actual stage of preparation and training. Congregational contexts establish “a teaching/learning environment beyond the seminary context in which there is explicit freedom to inquire, question, explore, experiment, acknowledge limitations, fail, and succeed.”²⁹

Inductive phase of clergy education engages congregations

A particular emphasis Desmond van der Water brought to the discussion of theological education is the “primary role of the local church, parish, or congregation in the processes of formation for ministry and mission.”³⁰ The literature reflects the importance of the first three to five years in pastoral ministry.³¹ Whether aware or unaware, congregations are formative for pastoral leaders, positively or negatively.³² The Transition into Ministry initiative, funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., invested in reshaping the preparation of Protestant clergy through supplementing the preservice phase of clergy education with a focused apprenticeship in local congregations.³³ The belief that pastors become pastors through the actual performance of ministry in local congregational contexts informed this investment in clergy training and development.³⁴ Emerging as a unique phase in theological education, this period of formal training in the transition from the academy to the contextual setting serves as an inductive phase of clergy education by partnering seminaries with congregations. Finally, the programs of transition into ministry help to cultivate “habits of lifelong learning that are critical to excellence in ministry throughout one’s career.”³⁵ These important habits are cultivated in this inductive phase, but sustaining them requires ongoing relationships among clergy, congregations, and theological schools.

The call for lasting relationships through engagement

The future of theological schools, according to Aleshire, “will, in many ways, be defined by the ways in which schools are shaped by and respond to changes in the church, higher education, and the Christian movement as it advances in the twenty-first century.”³⁶ He does not advocate that schools abandon their role in being faithful to the church and educating the clergy, in serving the needs of the church, or in serving as higher education institutions. What is crucial, according to Aleshire, is that theological schools have “a meaningful relationship with ecclesial bodies.”³⁷ He notes that “theological schools have both the creativity and capacity to engage”³⁸ new models of relationship with churches. One such model of engagement for theological schools would be based on the elective classification of The Carnegie Foun-

dation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT) called Community Engagement. *Engagement* refers to two-way interaction between the academy and the community. It represents a shift away from the expert model of knowledge delivery by the academy to the public “toward a more collaborative model in which community partners play a significant role in creating and sharing knowledge to the mutual benefit of institutions and society.”³⁹

Formal engagement between seminary and congregation

The CFAT classification of Community Engagement recognizes a college or university that has “institutionalized Community Engagement in its identity, culture, and commitments.”⁴⁰ The Foundation states, “Community Engagement describes the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.”⁴¹ Recent reports on Community Engagement are promising. Amy Driscoll, a consulting scholar with CFAT, provided some of the initial evaluation of this elective classification for institutions of higher learning. “The classification framework for community engagement has achieved its intention: to respect the diversity of institutional contexts and approaches to engagement, to encourage a reflective inquiry and self-assessment process that is practical and provides useful data, and to affirm good work while urging even better.”⁴² She also states that the national recognition that accompanies this new classification has “enhanced both the prominence and promise of community engagement in higher education.”⁴³

A formalized connection for seminaries and congregations would recognize the strength, success, and importance of the many projects of the Transition into Ministry initiative and would extend the learnings from these new developments into lasting models of theological education and training. The rise of residency programs reflects how young clergy, congregations, and church leaders recognize the value of such programs for building toward more successful careers and better-prepared clergy.⁴⁴ Encouraging and recognizing theological schools that collaborate with congregations in residency programs should give greater value to the clergy profession and to the role of the theological school in partnership with congregations. Institutionalizing the engagement of seminaries with congregations and congregations with seminaries will create a welcome and innovative collaboration between these two institutions. Such a reciprocal partnership would enable a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge, resources, learning, and ministerial training. The age-old theory-practice divide, which can constitute a gap, or at worst a combat zone, between the seminaries and the congregations, could become a realm of healthy, creative tension that promotes excellence in practice and scholarship, in the clergy and laity.

Next steps lead to lasting relationships

The new venture in inductive clergy education brought on by the Transition into Ministry initiative should serve to encourage exploration of ways for seminaries to grow their relationships with congregations. Wind and Wood

report broad agreement concerning the strength of pastoral formation in and through the practice of ministry. "However, discussion continues about how theological schools can shape their engagement with academic disciplines and practices of formation in ways that more effectively connect with the practice of ministry."⁴⁵ Wood claims that "collaboration between the work of seminaries and the life of congregations is crucial."⁴⁶ The Alban report indicated that the residents were not the only ones learning. Members of these congregations discovered "just how much they have to teach and learn together."⁴⁷ A Congregational Engagement elective classification for seminaries is an approach worth consideration for moving from a deposit-and-withdrawal transaction in clergy training, to lifelong theological education for clergy and laity in ongoing relationships.

The Association of Theological Schools, as the formalizing body, should present this challenge to its member schools. A classification of Congregational Engagement, coordinated through the Association, for theological schools with a demonstrated commitment to ongoing involvement with congregations, would encourage the exploration and development of such relationships, and promoting these relationships would emphasize the value that is placed on them. Each institution could retain its individuality, its approach to doctrinal education, and its preferred curricular approach. However, since Congregational Engagement is an elective classification, member theological schools would not be required to apply for it.

The Association of Theological Schools would provide institutions with a framework allowing them to develop and document their engagement efforts. The documentation process would enable individual seminaries to clarify meanings of engagement that fit their missions, contexts, and goals. The documentation framework could follow the intention of the CFAT framework guide so that it would "support multiple definitions, diverse approaches, and institutionally unique examples and data."⁴⁸ Content would be submitted relating to institutional identity and culture as reflected in the mission statement and publicity materials, recognition through campus-wide awards and celebrations, and promotion of engagement by executive leadership of the institution. Information reflecting commitment by the institution evident in the infrastructure and budget and measurement of the impact upon the students, faculty, community and the institution would be reported. Other possible indicators of institutional commitment include support for promotion and tenure reward for faculty and opportunities for student leadership roles with engagement. Other data could be submitted in the categories of curriculum, outreach, and partnerships.

Many theological schools are probably already involved in practices that would reflect an ongoing involvement with congregations, whether through their curriculums, speaking engagements by professors, students who serve part time in congregations, or perhaps some existing partnerships with congregations. The classification would allow the schools to reflect on the ways they were already involved, build upon the opportunities available, and affirm the value of making such partnerships with congregations intentional. Engagement practices would be evident through courses reflecting service-

learning opportunities and the integration of engagement in student leadership, research, and internships. Students would gain in their learning from practical settings, the congregations would be recipients of service, and the seminary would demonstrate its commitment to the congregations that help support it and remain connected to the needs of local contexts that aid in future curricular design. The relationship would become a reciprocal activity of learning, benefit, and service. Faculty engagement beyond the classroom—including conference presentations, workshops, and publications—represents practices currently valued by theological schools and their personnel. Proposed expanded areas of involvement and partnership between seminaries and congregations would include service and involvement of faculty and staff in congregations, educational and learning opportunities for laity, continuing education opportunities for clergy, and supportive involvement in the transitional years from seminary to ministry contexts. These practices would also provide for a mutually beneficial exchange.

Evaluations and reports are now emerging from the colleges and universities that have elected to participate in the classification for Community Engagement. Findings point to potential gains and impacts for theological schools to elect for participation in a Congregational Engagement certification.⁴⁹ Engagement can be used to improve teaching efficacy; improve relations with congregations; deepen the ethic of volunteerism and service among students; and aid grant reporting, accreditation, and continuous improvement. Furthermore, “the link between engagement and fundraising is growing dramatically.”⁵⁰ Engagement and investment in congregations may encourage additional or new philanthropic interests for theological schools. Engagement also creates expanded opportunities to recognize and reward faculty in the areas of promotion and tenure, which can be of particular aid to faculty in traditional practical ministry disciplines.

Would theological schools choose voluntarily to do additional paperwork and engage in additional self-reflection? Realistically, a few pioneer schools would need to take the time and the risk. As a beginning point in developing such a classification and encouraging seminaries to participate, The Association of Theological Schools could invite those seminaries and congregations that have participated in the Transition into Ministry initiative to engage in conversation about this opportunity. The early reports of the Transition into Ministry programs point to a value in the extended learning for young clergy. Certainly these schools and congregations, and the clergy involved, have a deep value and vested interest in the benefits of these relationships and would have creative and concrete input for aspects to include in generating a framework for a Congregational Engagement classification. The potential gains are worth the risk, and the demands for innovation in the partnerships of seminaries and congregations warrant taking action.

Congregational engagement may benefit clergy continuing education

One lasting impact of seminary and congregational relationships would be the benefits of clergy continuing education. In the introduction to their recent book *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and*

Christian Ministry, Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra raise questions related to these very issues. One argument put forth in the book is that “preparation for ministry extends far beyond the years of academic theological education.”⁵¹ Thus they encourage ministers and faculties to ask, “How can and should your school contribute to the pastoral education and formation that continue after your students’ graduation?”⁵² Furthermore, they encourage pastors and leaders in theological schools, denominational structures, and congregations to strengthen vocational calling among members and to ask about forms of support and apprenticeship that are needed by pastors not only before and during seminary years “but beyond them as well.”⁵³

McMillan, in a national Pulpit and Pew survey with information gathered from 883 pastors, reports on areas of greater and lesser job satisfaction. Some of the factors on the less satisfied list have to do with support structures for clergy, including peer relationships, denominational support, and continuing education.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, clergy are primarily left to their own personal initiative to seek out, identify, and engage in continuing professional education as they move from the stages of early practice to proficiency and continue toward excellence in their practice. Excellence in ministry requires resiliency, agility and reflective leadership, trust and personal authority, staying connected, and self-directed and lifelong learning.⁵⁵ Clergy, as independent agents in professional practice, benefit from external support for their overall professional health and effectiveness as practitioners.⁵⁶ Congregational Engagement would encourage congregational leaders to develop appreciation and value for supporting their clergy with time, resources, and opportunities for sustaining their ministry through continuing education and peer support. McMillan asks, “If one were to ‘color outside the lines’ what might be some other creative approaches to the content and structure of Continuing Education in the 21st Century?”⁵⁷ Congregational Engagement would support continuing education for clergy and create increased opportunities for the lifelong learning that is crucial to effectiveness in ministry.

Respond, take action, engage

An elective classification for Congregational Engagement would create lifelong partnerships between seminaries and congregations. While maintaining respect for the individuality and diversity of theological schools and their contexts, Congregational Engagement would bring these institutions forward as active partners not only in the preparation of ministers but also as participants in the ongoing development and effectiveness of ministry. These partnerships would aid congregations in their efforts to be effective and provide increased opportunities for laity and clergy. Rather than rest in the growing success of the Transition into Ministry initiative, The Association of Theological Schools, in partnership with its accredited theological schools, can take action on the insights gleaned from these programs and extend the benefits of clergy education through the transition into lifelong partnerships of learning and effective ministry.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to extend grateful appreciation to Lorilee R. Sandmann, professor in adult education at the University of Georgia's Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy, who gave of her time and expertise to read and provide insightful feedback in preparation of this article.

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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.

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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*, 16th ed., 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 editors@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.

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1. The audience for *Theological Education* includes people from multiple academic disciplines and diverse religious traditions, who share in common their work as theological educators. Have you written with this audience in mind?
2. Is the article timely? Does it contribute significantly to current interdisciplinary discourse about theological education?
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4. Will the article spark useful debate on the topic?
5. Is the article well-written with a clear focus and well-developed/supported arguments?
6. Is the research methodology sound and appropriate?
7. If applicable, does the article make accurate use of the data available from ATS and other sources?
8. Does the article conform to the submission guidelines listed above?

