

# TE | Theological Education

## ISSUE FOCUS

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*Richard J. Mouw*

**Learning Amidst Transforming Traditions**

*Mary Hess*

**The Rest of the Story: Edward Farley,**

*Thinking About Things and Other Frivolities: A Life*

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**From the Last Fifty Years and into the Next Fifty**

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**Theological Education at Fifty: Then and Now**

*Stephen R. Graham and Eliza Smith Brown*

**Fifty Years of Accrediting Theological Schools**

*Daniel O. Aleshire*

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

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The **ISSUE 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.

**CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION** invites responses, of up to 1,500 words, to previously published articles in the journal in order to foster conversation among its readers. Reader responses may be emailed to [editors@ats.edu](mailto:editors@ats.edu). Responses are published at the discretion of the editors and may be edited for length.

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.

*Theological Education* invites manuscript submissions that are consistent with the journal's purposes as enumerated in its mission statement. Unsolicited submissions satisfying initial review by the journal editors will be sent for blind peer review to members of the review board, who make recommendations to the editors regarding their publication. The editorial board will not consider manuscripts that are being submitted simultaneously to other publications.

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## ***Theological Education* Mission Statement**

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

## **Submission Guidelines**

1. Recommended length is 3,750 words (approximately 15 double-spaced pages).
2. Follow *Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th ed., using one-inch margins, left justification, footnotes, and 12 pt. Times New Roman.
3. Write in the third-person form when possible.
4. If quoting Scripture, include the Bible translation with each reference.
5. The latest editions of *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate 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 (1–2 sentence) paragraph at the end of the article identifying the author(s), institution(s), current position(s), and, when appropriate, the author's relationship with the project/topic.
8. Submissions should be emailed to [editors@ats.edu](mailto:editors@ats.edu).

## **Author's Checklist**

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 the article contribute significantly to current interdisciplinary discourse about theological education?
3. Does the subject matter represent new ideas or experiences that colleagues at other theological schools can incorporate into their teaching or administration?
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?

# Editor's Introduction

Stephen R. Graham

It is an honor to introduce this 50th anniversary edition of *Theological Education* to our readers with its new look and its review of a half-century of scholarship serving The Association of Theological Schools and the broader public. In preparing this issue, we have asked contributors to reflect on the past 50 years to identify significant changes and continuities but also to think about what the past might mean for the future of theological education. We are very privileged to have an outstanding lineup of authors representing a cross section of expertise, experience, and perspectives.

To set the stage, Richard Mouw, professor of faith and public life and president emeritus of Fuller Theological Seminary, reflects on what is theological about theological education from the vantage point of extensive involvement with ATS over the course of the past 25 years, half this journal's history. In his article titled by the same name, he acknowledges and celebrates the remarkable diversity of theological perspectives among the schools within the Association and argues that, across this broad diversity of theological education and scholarship, all the schools exist to pursue a *theological* task as they endeavor "to think clearly about how all that God has revealed to human beings speaks to the complexities of created reality." The task is too large for any one school or set of schools, and each has its own contribution to make. Mouw challenges schools to think of new ways of providing the kind of theological education that can strengthen the mission of the Christian community.

Mary Hess, professor of educational leadership at Luther Seminary, in "Learning Amidst Transforming Traditions," explores what is educational about theological education. Referencing the work of scholars such as Mary Boys, Parker Palmer, and Robert Kegan, she argues for theological schools to set aside fear of transformation and to embrace learning that builds community, values and remains open to otherness, and embarks on a complex journey of identity construction. Hess describes theological education as "giving people access to the traditions of religious communities and making manifest the intrinsic connection between traditions and transformation." She concludes with the contention that "what is educational about theological education might well be *everything*," and

challenges theological schools to move toward a “deeply relational and thoroughly adult kind of learning.”

Author of the most extensive history of theological education, Glenn Miller, Waldo Professor Emeritus of Ecclesiastical History at Bangor Theological Seminary, contributes a reflective review of the recently published book, *Thinking About Things and Other Frivolities: A Life*, by Edward Farley. Miller notes that “in *Thinking About Things*, Farley exposes some of the biographical details that prepared him to undertake his own recasting of theological education,” through a variety of influential publications including his conversation-shaping book published in 1983, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*.

Nancy Ammerman, professor of sociology of religion at Boston University School of Theology, looks at changes in the religious terrain of the United States over the past 50 years and illustrates ways the changes bring new demands to theological education. In “America’s Changing Religious and Cultural Landscape and its Implications for Theological Education,” she focuses on two broad issues: changes in American culture leading to challenges to “the very notion of religious communities and religious leadership” and, in the midst of those challenges, the ongoing importance of religious communities. She argues that local congregations are more important than ever to the faith and spiritual lives of the individuals in them, to society at large, and to the faith traditions in which theological educators live and do their work. Not only do they provide fellowship—indeed, for many, they are a primary source of cultural identity—and model what it means to serve others, but they also offer places where people can experience a relationship with the divine. Yet the changes in those communities and in the larger society necessitate adaptations. Ammerman concludes that “being a religious leader no longer means stepping into a ready-made community; it means building one.” Theological schools must find ways to equip their students to build communities of faith as well as to serve within them.

In “The Change We Need: Race and Ethnicity in Theological Education,” Willie James Jennings, associate professor of theology and black church studies at Duke University Divinity School, reflects on the past few decades of experience for racial/ethnic minorities and women, and charges schools to move beyond *management* of diversity to *embodiment* of diversity in their educational processes and in their common life. He describes “the invasion of predominately white theological institutions by racial and



ethnic minorities” as “one of the single most important changes in theological education in the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century.” Jennings challenges schools to engage in a “new conversation” about the “form of excellence in scholarship and teaching and student cultivation” leading to “the intellectual presence of racial and ethnic faculty members” at “the core of institutional reflection on good scholarship, teaching, and student formation.” He calls the advances made in issues of race and ethnicity in theological schools “a very serious work in progress,” which must continue into a “new stage where it must develop authentically decolonial habits of mind that transform theological schools into places that educate people toward one another and not simply beside one another.”

Justo L. González offers insightful reflections for theological education in “From the Last Fifty Years and into the Next Fifty.” Recipient of the 2014 ATS Distinguished Service Award for his outstanding contributions to theological education for more than five decades, González has served theological education, the church, and the broader public as a scholar, a teacher, and a leading voice on behalf of the Hispanic community. He points to the 1970s as a pivotal era that witnessed a growing presence of Hispanics in North America and significant efforts among Latinos and Latinas to improve their theological education. From a time when he was the only tenured Hispanic faculty member in an ATS member school, to the 1990s when he recognized a handful of closely knit colleagues, to the present when the numbers of Latino/Latina faculty and administrators in ATS schools have grown significantly, there has been progress, but González also notes that “the changes that are taking place in the churches and in theological education go far beyond these horizons.” The “practical monopoly” on theological education enjoyed by ATS schools 50 years ago has been broken, he notes, with thousands of Latinos and Latinas “being ordained and given pastoral responsibilities without benefit of formal seminary education.” To address these issues, González calls for a much broader view of theological education than is the norm in ATS member schools, in terms of both breadth of time (a lifelong continuum) and types of preparation (for a wide variety of areas of service). He concludes, “It is up to seminaries and schools of theology to find their place in the forms of theological education that are now emerging.”

ATS Executive Director Daniel Aleshire takes the opportunity of the anniversary issue to offer reflections in “Fifty Years of Accrediting

Theological Schools,” which outlines important continuities as well as significant changes that have taken place in the work of accreditation. He notes that, during the journal’s five decades of publication, “the only consistent activity of the Association for all of those years has been accreditation.” Over the years, accreditation has had two goals: “first, to assure a minimum quality of educational and institutional capacity, and second, to promote improvement in both these areas.” These goals have remained constant, but Aleshire notes changes that have altered the character of accreditation. First, he describes changes in the fundamental perspectives guiding the work and the questions that accreditation has asked of member schools. He notes four key areas of development, from an initial “resource-based accreditation,” to “mission-based accreditation” with its recognition of the distinctive character and purposes of schools within the Association, to accreditation based on evaluation, including the more recent focus on learning outcomes, and finally “regulatory accreditation” driven by “a changed focus in the use of accreditation by the US federal government. A second driver of changes in accreditation have been changing practices in theological education, most significantly changing patterns of educational delivery, new constituencies served by the schools, and issues related to authority and governance.

Finally, Stephen Graham, ATS senior director of programs and services and Eliza Smith Brown, ATS director, communications and external relations, both editors of *Theological Education*, survey the journal’s first 50 years identifying a number of key themes and issues covered by the journal as they reflect the larger developments in theological education and The Association of Theological Schools. Overall, they identify two overarching trends that the journal reflects over the half-century: growing *diversity* of persons, programs, and practices, and the increasing *complexity* of the schools, their operations, and expectations placed upon them.

The previous issue of *Theological Education* published an article by John (Jay) Phelan, of North Park Theological Seminary, suggesting the advantages and disadvantages of seminaries linking with universities. This issue continues the conversation with a response to that article written by Fr. Joe Chinnici, OFM, president of Franciscan School of Theology, and Mary Lyons, president of the University of San Diego, whose two schools signed an affiliation agreement in 2013.

The Open Forum section of the journal includes two articles that identify the trajectory that theological education has followed over the past 50

years and where we find ourselves today. Amos Yong proposes a glimpse of a way forward for theological educators perplexed by the “dizzying pluralism of the present time,” through a model of theological exploration based on Pentecostal-charismatic renewal movements. Timothy Lincoln proposes “specific ways to improve the linkages between theological education and the practice of ministry,” based on empirical studies of what pastors actually do. He offers suggestions to seminaries by commentators that range from the very practical to the more conceptual.

As we celebrate the first 50 years of *Theological Education*, we hope this volume of the journal will help theological educators review where the enterprise has been, evaluate its present, and look with hope to its future.

In Memoriam  
**Edward Farley**  
1929–2014

A 50-year retrospective of the *Theological Education* journal would not be complete without a tribute to the late Edward Farley, who died on December 27, 2014. A luminary in theological scholarship, Farley brought to his life's work a broad intellectual range—including not only his chosen field of philosophical theology but also a keen interest in literature, science, art, music, and the natural world.

Farley held a mirror to the work of theological schools, which he described as "multiple resource centers for laypeople and congregations."<sup>1</sup> He participated in national conversations about the state of theological education, and his two books on the subject—*Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (1983) and *Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church and the University* (1988)—deeply influenced the Basic Issues Project and how theological educators have reflected on their work.

A Kentucky native and graduate of Centre College, Farley went on to Louisville Presbyterian Seminary and received his PhD from Union Theological Seminary/Columbia University in 1957. He taught at DePauw University and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary before going in 1969 to Vanderbilt University Divinity School, where he taught for three decades, ultimately as the Buffington Professor of Theology.

Farley's final work of his 12 books and monographs was an autobiography titled *Thinking About Things and Other Frivolities*, published just a few months before his death. It captured his intellect and passionate engagement with life. "Follow wisdom wherever it is to be found," he advised just days before he died. "The world is so beautiful and varied—let it show itself."<sup>2</sup>

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1. "Toward Theological Understanding: An Interview with Edward Farley," *The Christian Century* 115, no. 4 (February 4, 1998): 113–115, <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=366>.

2. Ray Waddle, "Remembering Nashville Theologian, Musician Ed Farley," *The Tennessean* (Jan. 2, 2015).

# Issue Focus



# What's Theological About Theological Education?

*Richard J. Mouw*

*Fuller Theological Seminary*

*ABSTRACT: The author analyzes briefly five aspects of theological education he has experienced over the past 25 years of the journal's existence, noting the value of theological diversity found among the Association's member schools and how that translates into the scope and character of theology respectively. The schools, he says, share a conviction that Commission accreditation and ATS programming make for a challenging but rewarding membership and effective theological educational communities.*

## The value of theological diversity

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Shortly after my retirement from my 20-year stint as president of Fuller Theological Seminary, a friend from a denominationally sponsored theological school asked me this question: "How in the world did you manage to lead such a diverse school as Fuller? I mean, how did *you* manage it—a self-declared Calvinist, presiding over a student body from all over the evangelical map: Mennonites, Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans, Baptists, 'emergent' types, and Lord knows what else? How did you pull it off?"

I did not have a very detailed answer to offer. Basically, the challenge for leading any diverse community is to find value in that diversity while also constantly exploring the underlying commonalities that brought people to that diverse community in the first place. And I learned much in the process of attempting to "pull it off" at Fuller.

The diversity that I was called to "manage" in my home theological turf pales into insignificance, though, in the light of the kind of diversity that characterizes The Association of Theological Schools (ATS). It is often remarked that ATS, with its membership of 270-plus institutions in the United States and Canada, is one of the most broadly ecumenical organizations that you can find anywhere in the Christian world. It is difficult to imagine more theological diversity than is typically on display at an ATS Biennial Meeting: Catholics, mainline Protestants, Pentecostals,

Unitarians, Dispensationalist evangelicals, and many more varieties, all meeting together with a common focus on quality theological education.

“Managing” that diversity is an ongoing and challenging process that is much like what I described in answering my friend’s question about my Fuller presidency. It requires genuinely valuing the diversity while constantly concentrating on the common purposes that draw such a rich mix

of institutions into that diversity in the first place.

“*The challenge for leading any diverse community is to find value in that diversity while also constantly exploring the underlying commonalities that brought people to that diverse community in the first place.*”

I admire—I can even say love—ATS’s diversity. Just as I can say that as an evangelical Calvinist presiding over a diversely evangelical school expanded and strengthened my sense of Christian identity, so also has my 25 years of active participation in the even more diverse community of schools in ATS.

My involvement in ATS activities began not too long after I joined the Fuller Seminary faculty in 1985, when Leon Pacala, then the Association’s executive director, invited

me to participate in a project, “The Aims and Purposes of Theological Education.” Having come to seminary education after teaching for 17 years in an undergraduate philosophy department, this was a formative experience for me. I still draw on the wisdom I received from those discussions.

I have stayed very active in ATS functions over the years, including terms on both the Commission on Accrediting (now named “Board of Commissioners”) and the Association’s Board of Directors. During this period of involvement—which covers half of this journal’s 50-year history—I have not only witnessed amazing growth in institutional memberships, but I have also lived with ATS during two-and-a-half decades wherein theological schools have faced some significant challenges. Rapid cultural changes—technological, interfaith, political, demographic—have impacted the patterns of church life, and all of this, in turn, has forced those of us in theological education to think new thoughts about important matters. Many of those challenges are worrisome, but they can also be



seen as opportunities, especially if questions about the scope of the “theological” stay front and center within our ranks.

## **A shared conviction of accreditation and ATS programming**

When the well-known Christian ethicist James Gustafson was invited to deliver the Ryerson Lecture at the University of Chicago in 1981, he titled his presentation “Saying Something Theological.” To explain his choice of a title, he recounted a bar conversation he had with a biologist colleague, who had just finished a long day of work at a conference exploring issues in human genetics. After a few drinks, the scientist confessed to Gustafson that the nature of his religious upbringing, the tenets of which he had long abandoned, made him uneasy about being in the presence of theologians.

The time they were now spending together, the scientist said, was the longest he had experienced in his adult life with someone committed to the theological enterprise. Then, toward the end of their conversation, Gustafson reported, “with great sentiment he put his left arm around my shoulder and said, ‘Gustafson, say something theological!’” While Gustafson was caught off guard, he told his Ryerson audience that he at least “had the presence of mind to say, ‘God.’”<sup>1</sup>

If someone were to conduct a poll of the persons attending a plenary session of an ATS/COA Biennial Meeting, it is quite likely that there would be clear consensus that Gustafson’s response was a proper one. Theology, we would all agree, has something to do with the deity—with thinking about God and what belief in the reality of the divine means for contemporary life. Beyond that, however, differences would quickly surface about how to move on theologically from that basic starting point.

This willingness to come together, despite our differences, is motivated by a shared conviction that our individual institutions are strengthened by agreed-upon standards for accreditation facilitated by active support for processes of peer review. And in our willingness to participate in the activities and programs of ATS, we are giving expression to our conviction that, while we have much in common with other kinds of educational institutions in the broader academy, it is important to focus together specifically

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1. James M. Gustafson, *Moral Discernment in the Christian Life: Essays in Theological Ethics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 86.

on the opportunities, challenges, and norms for evaluation that have to do specifically with something called *theological* education.

One factor that holds this ecumenically diverse assortment of educational institutions together is that while we are all committed to theological education, we avoid getting too specific about the actual contents of theology. I consider that a blessing. The rich ecumenical diversity is possible precisely because we do not impose theological specifics on one another. We do, of course, foster agreements about what kinds of issues a school's theological curriculum ought to address. We require every accredited school, for example, to demonstrate that students are being sensitized to the realities of globalization, but we allow for considerable breadth in how a given school will address these realities. One school might encourage some involvement in international service, while another might place more of an emphasis on studying the history of the global missionary movement.

In focusing on matters of this nature, the Association takes care to honor the stated theological allegiances of each institution. A case in point: in recent years, ATS has insisted that in our present ecclesiastical and societal contexts a theological curriculum must give attention to gender issues. This does not mean that, for example, ATS is putting pressure on Catholic seminaries to provide theological support for the ordination of women to the priesthood. But it does signal a shared conviction that a school that is not equipping persons preparing for ministry to be conversant with the gender issues that loom large in churches and in the larger culture is not serving its constituency well in this regard. The key is that each theological school must demonstrate that it is addressing questions of this sort within the framework of its stated theological commitments.

## **The scope and character of theology**

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Not only does our Association embrace schools with different specific theological perspectives, but it also exhibits considerable diversity in its understanding of the scope and character of theology. In the traditional "four-fold curriculum" approach to theological education, theology—understood usually as dogmatics or systematic theology—was typically given a place alongside three other areas of study: Bible, history, and the practices of ministry. That way of organizing the curriculum has been criticized by many in recent years on the grounds that theology should be

understood as designating the rubric under which all of seminary study should be organized. The serious study of the Bible, of the history of the Christian movement, of the practices of ministry, is itself in each case properly understood as theological.

Another way in which the scope of theology has been debated has to do with the ongoing discussions of how to demarcate—if it is proper to demarcate at all—the boundary between theology and religious studies. Those who insist on keeping the boundary lines clear often do so because of strong commitments to a confessional tradition. The study of religion, frequently conducted out of a professed posture of “neutrality” regarding any specific religious truth claims, is viewed as inappropriate for equipping persons for the serving of communities—Lutheran, Catholic, Reformed, Wesleyan, and the like—where adherence to a “thick” confessional tradition is expected.

“The rich ecumenical diversity is possible precisely because we do not impose theological specifics on one another.”

Some of us gravitate more toward the way theology gets set forth in the confessional documents of the Christian traditions, while others prefer something more like a “religious studies” approach. Another interesting debate has occurred between intellectuals in the Reformed tradition and their Catholic friends about how rigorously we need to draw the boundaries between theology and philosophy.

## Effective theological educational communities

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My own conception of the scope of theology is a broad one. To engage in theological education and scholarship is, as I see it, *to think clearly about how all that God has revealed to human beings speaks to the complexities of created reality*. Not everyone in theological education will agree with that admittedly expansive formulation. But given that we all are being forced these days to think new thoughts about what it means to engage energetically in theological education, I am not reluctant to offer a few comments about the implications of this broad understanding of the theological task.

For one thing, my formulation sets forth a “job description” for theological education that none of us, as individuals and institutions, can

pursue effectively on our own. We need one another, in these days more than ever. Obviously, that is too complex a job description for any single individual to fulfill. Indeed, it is too large a task for any single theological school to take upon itself.

It has often occurred to me, when engaged in an accrediting visit as a member of an evaluation team assigned to do a peer review of a specific school's programs, that our project is much like that of anthropologists spending time studying a tribe whose culture is new to the investigators. It is one thing to read books about a specific tradition—say Pentecostalism or Methodism or the Jesuits—but another to visit a campus where the theological details of that tradition are embodied in an actual educational community. We prepare for our visit by reading documents in which the “tribal” leaders describe the patterns of their life as an educational community. We interview students, faculty, administrators, trustees, staff—thus encountering living, breathing, theological educators and students who are committed to our shared goals for theological education but who pursue those goals in the light of their unique theological aims and purposes. More often than not we come away with new insights and perspectives that expand our own understandings of what it means to be an effective theological educational community. In a day when we all desperately need new insights and understandings, visits of this sort are occasions for receiving our own versions of “the gifts of the Spirit.” They are learning experiences, opportunities to exercise the gift of discernment.

And we need those “anthropological” visits, not only as lessons in theological diversity but also because of very practical realities. Most theological schools today are looking for new “markets,” new communities of learners, access to whom can help us gain the finances that are crucial for our stability—even in some cases for our very survival. To be successful in this, it is not enough simply to do more of the same in the hopes of adding more numbers. We need to think of new ways of providing the kind of theological education that can strengthen the mission of the Christian community.

## **Theology intersects with reality**

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While greeting worshipers after preaching recently at a Presbyterian congregation, someone asked me, “Are you seminary folks doing anything to help us understand what is going on with all of this TV and movie

stuff about vampires and zombies?” I told her that I did not know of any courses we teach on that subject, but I do wish we were addressing those topics.

Her question reminded me of a conversation I had while visiting Haiti, with an evangelical relief worker stationed there. He told me how much he had appreciated what he learned in an Introduction to Philosophy course that I had taught when he was an undergraduate. But then he offered an observation that caught me up short.

I really enjoyed reading and discussing Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, and I still think about some of the stuff you lectured on then. I especially enjoyed talking about the problem of evil. But I have to tell you: what you and Hume talked about when you discussed evil has little to do with the evil I find in this village—the evil of horrible poverty and hopelessness, the evil that people here turn to voodoo to try to address. I sure wish you had taught a course on that subject!

I was troubled by his complaint. Why is it that nothing I learned in graduate school had ever prepared me to teach the sort of course he was asking for? In his book *Contours of a Worldview*, the philosopher Arthur Holmes discusses the differences between “philosophers’ philosophy” and “theologians’ theology” on the one hand, and “world-viewish philosophy” and “world-viewish theology” on the other. The former explorations, he argues, deal with the questions that professional scholars pose to each other. Those “guild” discussions are important, I am convinced, and should not be ignored in our theological schools. But the second kinds of inquiries need more sustained attention in theological education today. They are our scholarly responses to questions that are posed to scholars from the context of living out a way of viewing reality. Holmes’s examples of the latter agenda are things of this sort: questions about the meaning of work, the marketplace, death and dying, play, leisure, art, technology, social institutions, sex, friendship—and much more.<sup>2</sup>

That may strike some as too broad an agenda for theological education. I cherish the opportunity to hear the counter-arguments, since I

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2. Arthur F. Holmes, *Contours of a World View* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), 35, 39–40.

know I would learn from them. Indeed, that is precisely why I have found participation in ATS to be such a gift. We share a basic and profound commitment to quality theological education, yet we do so out of very different theological perspectives. ATS is not the place for theological agreement. For that we turn to other communities and networks. But it is the place to go to for important and stimulating—and, I am convinced, much needed—conversations among people who are fond of “saying something theological” about an exciting, and increasingly challenging, venture in faith-based teaching and scholarship.

*Richard J. Mouw returned to teaching in the position of Professor of Faith and Public Life after 20 years as President of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California.*

# Learning Amidst Transforming Traditions

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*ABSTRACT: Theological education stands at a challenging crossroads, a moment in which what is educational about theological education may well be our most important question. Engaging the work of adult educators and inhabiting the shifts being made visible in digital cultures emphasize the necessity of understanding theological education in Mary Boys' terms as "the making accessible of the traditions of the religious community and the making manifest of the intrinsic connection between traditions and transformation."*

One of the most concise yet profound definitions of religious education available is that of Mary Boys: "Religious education is the making accessible of the traditions of the religious community and the making manifest of the intrinsic connection between traditions and transformation."<sup>1</sup> That same definition easily applies to the more narrow realm of theological education and lays bare the challenges that the entire ecology of our field inhabits. How does one give access to a religious community when there is less and less consensus within communities about what their traditions are? How does one help people to see a tradition always transforming, when they have no sense of history in general, let alone the specificity of a religious community's history?

## Theological education at a crossroad

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I was asked to write about what is educational in theological education, and it might well be that there is no more pressing question in our field. We often devote time to pondering what is theological about our identity, but when asked to describe *education* many of us all too easily draw upon images and experiences better labeled as *schooling*. That is, we have been formed and shaped by an industrial era model of teaching and

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1. Mary Boys, *Educating in Faith* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1989), 193.

learning, embedded in the public structures of mandatory public education. Even if we have sought to eschew those structures, they populate our imagination.

Absent any alternative imagination, the work of many theological educators has become an ever more shrill and anxious attempt to transfer the rich content of our disciplinary fields into the increasingly distracted heads of an ever more diverse student body. But what if we were to pause for a moment, to wonder and discern, to draw on the deep bones of the various communities of faith

**“***Theological education stands at an important crossroad at the moment, one that will determine our next hundred years.*

whom we serve, and to risk trusting the Divine whom we revere?

Parker Palmer argues that when we stand in the tragic gap—a location we might more specifically call that of the “already” and “not yet” or the disruptive in-breaking of the reign of God—our hearts will be broken. The only question he asks is whether our hearts will be broken open or broken into shards.<sup>2</sup>

I believe theological education stands at an important crossroad at the moment, one that will determine our next hundred years. The question I would put at that crossroads is Palmer’s—will we be broken open or into shards?

Demographic shifts, globalization of economies (to the detriment and oppression of the poor), resegregation of public schools, digital contexts with ever more pervasive impact on our attention spans, and increasingly conflicted public spaces are all significant adaptive challenges facing communities of faith more generally and theological schools more specifically.

The shrillness and anxiety of our responses to this changing landscape are in many ways a marker of the fear we have, a fear that has indeed broken some schools, some communities, into shards. But what if instead we are being broken open?

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2. Parker J. Palmer, *Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Heart* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011).



Palmer identifies five practices that can support this kind of opening up:

1. An understanding that we are all in this together
2. An appreciation of the value of otherness
3. An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways
4. A sense of personal voice and agency
5. A capacity to create community<sup>3</sup>

These practices resonate thoroughly with what scholars define as “adult developmental learning intentions.” Kathleen Taylor, Catherine Marienau, and Morris Fiddler, for instance, name such intentions as moving toward connection with others, knowing as a dialogical process, a dialogical relationship to self, being a continuous learner, and self agency and self authorship.<sup>4</sup>

## Transformative learning

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When we bring these descriptions of adult learning into a theological realm, Robert Kegan’s work is particularly helpful.<sup>5</sup> He argues that there is a series of shifts that happen in the midst of adult learning. Where he speaks of learning how to move “from complaint to commitment,” theological educators explore what we mean by that to which our faith calls us. Or when Kegan urges adults to move from “blame to personal responsibility,” we have much to offer in reflecting upon the process of forgiveness. Kegan writes of shifting from a perspective of praising/prizes to one of ongoing regard, and we have the language of grace. When Kegan writes of moving from a stance of rules and policies to one of public agreement, theological educators can urge a reclaiming of the language of covenant. Kegan’s argument is complex, but my primary point in engaging his ideas is to note that the practices that he and these other adult educators describe can also be grounded in the symbolic language systems of various religious traditions.

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3. Palmer, *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, 43–46.

4. Kathleen Taylor, Catherine Marienau, and Morris Fiddler, *Developing Adult Learners: Strategies for Teachers and Trainers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 32–33.

5. See here Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work: Seven Languages of Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001).

We have an opportunity right now to live into the specificity of our particular traditions, and to do so in ways that open us up and, in the process, give people “access to our traditions.” How do we do so? *We give them access to a deeper form of our traditions, and we embody the intrinsic connections between traditions and transformation.*

## **Confirmation**

Kegan has delineated a spiral process at the heart of transformative learning, a spiral that circles through confirmation, contradiction, and continuity.<sup>6</sup> *Confirmation* involves knowing your learners, your students, and your community well enough that you can enter their current forms of meaning making with sufficient respect and awareness that they recognize your narration of their frameworks. Most of us would argue, however, that staying in one place is not sufficient for pastoral leaders, let alone scholars on a pilgrimage of discovery.

## **Contradiction**

Kegan’s understanding of *contradiction* speaks to the process of disruption in meaning making, the showing forth of the cracks and crevices of our understanding, the kind of parabolic brokenness of which Anderson and Foley speak.<sup>7</sup> The journey of life itself invites disruptive experiences (think of parenting, of marriage, or of any of the other intense learning activities of adulthood), but contradictions are also invited by teachers through educational processes.

A common example in Christian settings might be that of engaging in biblical studies. Many of our students enter theological education with a deep and abiding respect for, and heart-felt commitment to, the Bible. But often that experience lacks awareness of the inherent contradictions to be found in Scripture, let alone resources to engage the challenges to

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6. See in particular *The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) and *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

7. “Parabolic narratives show the seams and edges of the myths we fashion. Parables show the fault lines beneath the comfortable surfaces of the worlds we build for ourselves . . . Parable keeps us moving toward the edge, so that we can discover and chart a better tomorrow.” Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 14, 32.

a devotional understanding that historical/critical scholarship offers. As teachers we need to be able to empathize deeply with our students' emotional engagements with the Bible; we need to be able to demonstrate respect for the ways in which it has functioned in their lives, even as we seek to offer contradictions to those ways of engaging it.<sup>8</sup>

Kegan's work is especially useful here, because the process of disrupting frames of meaning can be experienced as deeply painful, even violent, and without sufficient and appropriate support, such contradiction can lead people directly into one of two responses—fundamentalism or relativism. These stances might seem to be opposites, but they are both instances of a refusal to recognize and enter into the complexity of identity construction that is necessary in a postmodern world.

## Continuity

What does Kegan suggest by way of response? He offers the notion of *continuity*, a process for providing a container, a frame, which invites someone into a deeper and broader way of seeing the world. In relation to the Bible, for instance, and the dilemmas we have been exploring, providing continuity might mean inviting students to see in historical critical scholarship not only challenges to superficial interpretations of the Bible but also an invitation into a 2,000-year-old community of people following in the way of Jesus. Kegan's understanding of adult learning thus echoes deeply Palmer's five practices or the kind of meaning making required to thrive in the midst of the complexity and ambiguities of postmodern realities.

## Intrinsic formation

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How else might we, as theological educators, pragmatically support learning in the midst of these realities, with these developmental intentions? How do we support our students and our institutions, our communities and our traditions, breaking open, rather than breaking into shards? How do we provide sufficient continuity to sustain ourselves and our communities in the midst of the contradictions that emerge? How might we "make

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8. Incidentally, the same might be said of students who approach the Bible as simply a collection of historical artifacts that have no ability to reach out and transform them. These students, too, will have their meaning making disrupted as they discover Scripture's revelatory power.

manifest” a tradition always in transformation? In part by leaning into the shifts that are already occurring all around us and trusting that God is calling us to do so.

There are three shifts in learning that our current environment—an environment permeated by digital technologies—is pressing upon us: a focus on tacit knowing that benefits from inquiry-led approaches, a move away from teacher-centered to learning-centered pedagogies, and a shift from concern for the “public and private” to concern for the “personal and collective.” These shifts present new opportunities for how we educate in theological settings. They are also clearly pointed at the “intrinsic transformation” element of which Boys speaks.

What does it mean to “make manifest”? Words such as *epiphany* cluster around that discursive terrain. But so, too, do phrases like “show and tell.” Tacit knowing has always been important in theological contexts, but it becomes particularly vital when the bodies of knowledge in which we are working are no longer stable. Scholars such as Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown point to the fluidity and dynamism of knowledge creation in digital spaces.<sup>9</sup> Theologians such as Kathryn Tanner lean into a recognition of knowledge fluidity and claim it as an inherent aspect of Christian identity.<sup>10</sup> Theologians such as Willie James Jennings invite our respect for Christian traditions even while contradicting the dynamics that led to a desire to claim orthodoxy in terms of abstract, power-laden universals. He points instead to alternative frameworks by which we might recognize—in forms of tacit knowing—that which has been suppressed by dominant frames and that which invites imaginative “generativity.”<sup>11</sup>

We can “make manifest” by drawing on tacit knowing in our learning environments and making it visible, narrating it more explicitly, and inviting our students into religious practices. We can make manifest by helping our students to learn by feeling and doing as well as through ideation. Focusing

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9. Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown, *A New Culture of Learning: Cultivating the Imagination for a World of Constant Change* (CreateSpace, 2011).

10. I particularly resonate with Tanner’s comment that “Christianity is one big poem in that the meanings of its elements are subtle and ambiguous, and the connections among them elusive and associative, as matters of practice always are.” Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 91.

11. See in particular *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

on tacit knowing means that we move from a teacher-centered stance to a learning-centered one that aligns well with adult learning frameworks. In a world in which our knowledge is neither static nor objectivist, we must rest that much more deeply on relational frames—"the community of truth" of which Palmer speaks<sup>12</sup> and the "argument for knowing" of Tanner.<sup>13</sup>

Creating learning environments of this sort not only invites a focus on learning outcomes, but demands it, because we can no longer entirely control the content that we are sharing. Instead we must continually ask what is being learned, whether it is helping our students to have access to the traditions of religious communities, and whether the intrinsic connection between traditions and transformation is being formed.

Likewise, instead of obsessing over the public and the private—a dichotomy present in modernist circles but one that is not very useful in postmodern frames—scholars of digital spaces invite us to consider the ways in which persons active in contemporary public spaces distinguish between the personal and the collective.<sup>14</sup> Here Heidi Campbell is instructive in her exploration of the relationship between religion online and offline in a networked society. She identifies five traits of what she labels *networked religion*: networked community, storied identities, shifting authority, convergent practice, and a multisite reality.<sup>15</sup>

“As teachers we need to be able to empathize deeply with our students’ emotional engagements with the Bible; we need to be able to demonstrate respect for the ways in which it has functioned in their lives, even as we seek to offer contradictions to those ways of engaging it.”

12. Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (New York: HarperOne, 1993).

13. Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, 123–124.

14. Thomas and Seely Brown, *A New Culture of Learning*, 54–57.

15. Heidi A. Campbell, "Understanding the Relationship between Religion Online and Offline in a Networked Society," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 80, no. 1 (2012): 64–93.

These traits are distinguished much more by rhythms moving between the personal and the collective than they are by the public and the private. This description of networked religion, of the ways in which the personal and the collective become embodied in religious communities, is potentially quite resonant with certain kinds of theological imagination and one that again invites us to bring the treasures of our particular traditions into the collective spaces emerging in networked communities.

## Conclusion

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Perhaps I might conclude where I began, by noting that theological education can best be paraphrased as giving people access to the traditions of religious communities and making manifest the intrinsic connection between traditions and transformation, by asking what might break us open instead of into shards. The tragic gap, the already and not yet, the in-breaking of the reign of God—these are fertile spaces in which to learn. What is educational about theological education might well be *everything*. But we may only be able to grasp the whole if we can move away from an instrumentalist, static, “banking” definition of education, an industrialized “schooling” model of learning, and turn instead toward a deeply relational and thoroughly adult kind of learning. In doing so, we might find ourselves truly “inhabiting the questions” of which Rainer Maria Rilke writes, as well as living into Deuteronomy’s injunction in chapter six to teach and learn the love of God all the time, and Jeremiah’s claim in chapter 31 that the Lord has planted the law within our hearts.<sup>16</sup>

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16. Deuteronomy 6:4–10, Jeremiah 31:33–34, and Rainer Maria Rilke, in *Letter Four of Letters to a Young Poet*: “. . . have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and . . . try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don’t search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer,” trans. Stephen Mitchell, First Vintage Books Edition (New York: Random House, 1986).

# The Rest of the Story: Edward Farley, *Thinking About Things and Other Frivolities*: A Life

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*ABSTRACT: This article reviews Edward Farley's most recent book, Thinking About Things. As an intellectual biography, the book provides the autobiographical background that helps us understand one of his most significant books on theological education, Theologia, and it also provides an important glimpse into the life and thought of a significant theologian.*

During the 1980s, American theological educators, especially those in mainstream seminaries, participated in an intense discussion of the theological character of theological education.<sup>1</sup> The question was often posed as “what makes theological education, theological?” At the center of this discussion was Edward Farley’s important volume, *Theologia*.<sup>2</sup> Part of what made *Theologia* important was, of course, that it appeared early in the debate and, hence, was the one volume that all subsequent commentators had to discuss. *Theologia* was an important first step. Farley’s book was an intellectual work of the first order that combined sharp intellectual analysis, an acute awareness that the ordinary justifications for theological education did not work, and some important suggestions for

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1. For a more complete discussion, see Glenn T. Miller, *Piety and Plurality: American Theological Education Since 1960* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 249–278. Other major contributors include Charles Monroe Wood, *Vision and Discernment: An Orientation in Theological Study* (Decatur, GA: Scholar’s Press, 1985); Joseph C. Hough and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christian Identity and Theological Education*, Studies in Religions and Theological Scholarship, no. 1 (Atlanta: Scholar’s Press, 1985); David H. Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly: What’s Theological About a Theological School* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1992). Kelsey wrote a summary of the discussion in David H. Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1993).

2. Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983). Farley also stated his case in *The Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church and University* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).



how schools might conduct their affairs. Perhaps most important, Farley's book partially moved the understanding of theological education from isolated intellectual disciplines, largely historical in character, and practical courses to the development of a mode or habit of thought. The goal of post-Farley theological education was the development of what was also called theological reflection, doing theology, or pastoral imagination.

In many ways, Farley's extended essay was similar to Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology*.<sup>3</sup> To understand the comparison, we need to separate Schleiermacher's work in this key essay from his work in establishing the theological faculty of the University of Berlin. In many ways, the University of Berlin, including its theological faculty, was the product of more than a century of German experience.

“The goal of post-Farley theological education was the development of what was also called theological reflection, doing theology, or pastoral imagination.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, Germany had established a significant number of norms for advanced study, including a strong belief in *Bildung* or cultural formation, the ideal that all institutions were to serve German culture, and a system of state examinations that effectively put professional certification under governmental control. In addition—and this was

among the greatest gifts of the eighteenth century to subsequent ages—the ideal of research (rigorous disciplined examination) was engrafted into this ideal. Not surprisingly, the research ideal would frequently conflict with the confessional requirement that faculty in theology sign the appropriate confession of faith of the local state church.

The *Brief Outline* was originally intended as a theological reflection on how one might study theology best in order to become an effective religious leader. Despite its use in a course on theological encyclopedia, the proposed model was not about theological curriculum at all but about the process of theological thought and judgment. In that sense, the *Brief Outline* can be read either as a pyramid that begins with the most basic and

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3. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology, Drawn up to Serve as the Basis for Introductory Lectures*, trans. William Farrer (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1850, digitized 2007).



ends with the most specific or as a set of nestled concepts in which core and periphery inform one another. The *Brief Outline* also sees theological study as directed toward a *telos* or purpose. Schleiermacher's goal was to produce a virtuoso of religion, a person who could harmonize the many divergent instruments in the orchestra of faith and produce a symphony, a common sound.

In *Thinking About Things*, Farley exposes some of the biographical details that prepared him to undertake his own recasting of theological education. Perhaps, the most interesting are those that are biographically similar to Schleiermacher. Like Schleiermacher, three of the most important foundations of Farley's thought (and his personality) are his lifelong fascination with music, poetry, and philosophy. These forms of the human spirit, as *Thinking About Things* makes clear, support an epistemology that recognizes that all attempts to capture reality in abstractions is doomed to failure. Of course, Farley does not mean that we know nothing but, rather, that what we know is inherently limited. The type of knowing that is characteristic of poetry and music, consequently, informs many aspects of human apprehension:

Poetic mystery is, however, my general emotional orientation, and is a kind of matrix (a primordial *Gaia* or Earth Mother), or to change the metaphor, a fountain from which flows many streams. I shall mention only of these ways poetic mystery shapes various aspects of my life: knowing, individuals and relations, words (labels, categories), the tragic and the ethical.<sup>4</sup>

The type of knowing and thinking advocated in *Theologia*, of course, has many different historical and philosophical roots, but the meaning of this key term in Farley's work is clearer when one realizes that poetry and poetic knowledge are important components in his theory of knowledge. To take one step backward, commentators on *Theologia* have long recognized that the concept of *theologia* was, at least, in part the Christian attempt to express the ancient idea of *paideia* in terms of the style of thought characteristic of the monasteries and early universities. What is often overlooked is that much of ancient education, especially in Greece, was composed of

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4. Edward Farley, *Thinking About Things and Other Frivolities: A Life* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 85.

the memorization of extended quotations from the poets. If this observation is accurate, then we have another reason why this ancient form of education provided Farley with the most ancient source of his thinking about theological education.

Yet, this does not mean that the knowledge claimed by the sciences is purely relative. Farley is a self-confessed rationalist. The sciences, including the historical sciences, bring the best methods and forms of analysis to the objects of their study. If they are open to revision, as the history of science demonstrates, those revisions are based on the further applications of their methods, and not on the imposition of any standard outside of themselves.<sup>5</sup>

The fact that scientific knowing, no matter how limited, is subject to internal verification and review means that no external criteria can be brought to bear on questions of scientific import. This is the heart of Farley's famous metaphor of the "fall of the house of authority." In one of the clearest statements of what this means, Farley writes:

I resist determining the phases of early or late manuscripts, the authorship of ancient works, or the meaning of ancient terms by some other method than historical work; for instance, an institution's authority, a community's tradition, or a long-held theory of some sort.<sup>6</sup>

The question about religious authority, consequently, is not the question of whether the affirmations of that authority are true or false, adequate or inadequate. The real question is how those truths are derived, verified, and adjusted.

If so, why not simply collapse theological education into the historical study of religion? This was, of course, Schleiermacher's position. For him, dogmatic theology was simply a report on the faith current in the Christian church at a given time and place. As such, it was only a component in the matrix of thinking that composed theology. Farley admits that this understanding has academic standing, although it is not his interpretation of the nature of theology:

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5. Farley, *Thinking About Things*, 88.

6. Ibid.

Judged from these dissertations, theology appears to be a kind of historical-textual description with a dollop of criticism thrown in. This resolution of the ambiguity of theology reappears in the classroom. Thus, theology's subject tends to be past and present texts, and the pursuit of theology is the interpretation of these texts. If there is a "theological thinking," it tends to be a thinking from, against, or for what is written in a text.<sup>7</sup>

In this sense, theology is one of many historical studies, with its own corpus of literature and a commonly shared method.

Yet, Farley's embrace of the university's historicist methodology was, at best, partial. History and historical investigation, like most scientific enterprises, are concerned with the outer skin of human life. Every historical investigation, no matter how rooted in a disciplined community, is conducted under the cautionary flag that today's conclusions are tomorrow's beginning points. In that sense, history with its specialized knowing is phenomenological. What the historian sees is experienced over a number of personal horizons and from a variety of perspectives. And it is this aspect of the historical that informs the more philosophical aspects of Farley's thought. Farley was passionately concerned with phenomena and with phenomenology.

*Thinking About Things* provides us with some insights into Farley's position. After a brief stint as a college professor and later as a professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Farley spent his career as a professor in a university. For Farley, the university was more than an employer and much more than a place to ply his trade. Rather, the university was an environment that shaped his consciousness and his work. Although Farley was and has remained active in the Christian church, he noted that there was a difference in his relationship to the Presbyterian Church after moving to Vanderbilt:

Thus, my teaching career falls into two major periods: the years at DePauw and Pittsburgh Seminary, and the Vanderbilt years. I had not anticipated how different life would be in the Vanderbilt years. Changed was my relationship to the Presbyterian Church (USA). No longer

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7. Ibid., 132.

teaching at one of its seminaries as a “theologian of the church,” I lost whatever small visibility I had to denominational leaders. The result was that my activities outside my school shifted from denominational events to consultations in the broader setting of theological schools.<sup>8</sup>

The shift in location also marked a shift in studies. During his first sabbatical leave, Farley studied briefly with Karl Barth and read the great Reformed theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While he was at Pittsburgh, he studied Edmund Husserl’s works and laid his philosophical foundations. During his leaves from Vanderbilt, he studied phenomenology further, especially those philosophers that stressed intersubjectivity, and published his more reflective extended studies, including his *Ecclesial Man*, *Theologia*, and his *Good and Evil*.

Farley’s account of his fascination with European philosophy is a lover’s story that only an intellectual could write or appreciate. Basically, the goal of phenomenology is to understand the richness of our experience of the world. The nuance of the words here is important. Phenomenology does not directly concern itself with what actually is or with things as they are apart from our experience. This means that the phenomenologist’s first questions are not about the world but about the way in which a person experiences the world. Thus, we can inquire about religious experience without necessarily inquiring about God or the objectivity of religious objects. Thus, we can ask how participation in certain communities forms and shapes the self. These questions, it should be noted, are valid, even if the supposed religious object does not exist or exists only in radically different ways than might be supposed.

The importance of this method for Farley’s thought should not be underestimated. Farley tends to define the ontological center of religion as mystery and to see religious rituals and practices as ways of maintaining this mystery. This apparent vagueness allows a rich variety of beliefs, practices, ethics, and symbols to surround that mystery. To use what may seem to be a rather far-fetched metaphor, Farley’s “mystery” is like the black hole at the “center” of a galaxy. Without black holes and all their mathematical qualities, what is observed about the galaxies would make no sense. The data that we have makes their existence necessary, but the

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8. Ibid., 60.

black holes themselves are beyond ordinary observation as their powerful gravitational pull collapses everything near them into themselves.

The ultimately unattainable character of mystery does not mean that what happens in human religious life is uninteresting or beyond philosophical and historical investigation.

Just as every galaxy presents more than enough to inquiring minds, so religion and religious traditions present the mind with divergent material for thought. One can study the phenomenon of religion and make very discerning and important comments about that phenomenon without necessarily having to show how every study reflects or does not reflect the ultimate center in mystery. This is also true of other religious activities, including theology and theological education.

“Just as every galaxy presents more than enough to inquiring minds, so religion and religious traditions present the mind with divergent material for thought.”

This helps us, I believe, understand Farley's contribution to theological education and its long-ranged effects more clearly. For Farley, theology is a human activity that has, like all human activities, its own history and forms of being. In *Thinking About Things*, Farley calls his study “a deconstructive history,” by which he means that the book intends to show that the history of theological study carried the seeds of its own destruction and reconstruction.<sup>9</sup> Yet, *Theologia* also strongly reflects his phenomenological commitments. The designation of theology, for example, as an activity is much more a philosophical or phenomenological judgment than a historical observation.

An activity is, of course, something that a person does. This allowed Farley to use the language of activity, such as *habitus*, to describe what he meant by theology and theological education. As an activity, *theologia* enabled persons to orient themselves toward the world of experience and to adopt various ways of dealing with that reality. But this, in effect, stacked the deck. Whatever served to separate the activity from its proper

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9. Ibid., 121.

*telos* had to be a corruption. And so the history went downhill as *theologia* was gradually replaced by a series of studies that were only tangentially related to theology as an action and which might, in fact, inhibit that action.

Many theological educators have followed Farley's lead without necessarily adopting his arguments or his language. "Doing theology," "theological reflection," and "pastoral imagination"—all variations on Farley's basic insight—have become part of the jargon of modern, present-day theological education. In addition, much of the interest in finding a pedagogy for theological education, although those participating in this later quest come from a variety of perspectives, is rooted in a similar

“*Theological education is not preparation for a particular profession; it is education in a particular way of thinking.*”

understanding of theology and theological education. To teach people something that is as much a way of thinking as it is a rational examination is not an easy task. Part of the value of *Thinking About Things* is that one is able to see how Farley understood his own pedagogical practice and how he implemented it in his own work as a teacher. Not surprisingly, one

discovers that the impact of the university, its bureaucracy, financing, and standards, shaped Farley's own practice in decisive ways. Whatever theological education might be, Farley was himself a university teacher, a critical but very loyal child of the modern educational system.

For many commentators, one of the most striking aspects of Farley's work on theological education was his insistence that theological education move beyond the so-called clerical paradigm. In this, Farley shared the widespread dissatisfaction with the professional model that seemed to stress the formation of institutional leaders as the goal of theological instruction. In somewhat overblown language, one might say that many theological educators wondered how such high formal thought and research could be devoted to such a low and mundane purpose. However, if theological thought was an activity that was somehow a given in ecclesiastical life, then such thought was part of the general world of Christian practice, like other Christian practices, and was naturally present to a lesser and greater extent in all believers. If this line of reasoning was accurate, then there was no necessary reason for theological education to be tied to

the training of clergy. The key word is necessary. Theological education is not preparation for a particular profession; it is education in a particular way of thinking. This type of thinking may be valuable, even essential, for the leadership of a religious organization, but its value is not confined to such persons. The argument seems more obtuse than it may be. Legal education is naturally necessary for those who practice law, but the same way of thinking can and should inform congressmen, corporate executives, and bureaucrats. In fact, only a handful of those receiving legal training enter traditional legal practice.

In other words, theological thinking was something that was present “to a degree” in all ecclesiastical life. The line separating the Sunday school teacher and the archbishop was not a sharp line between the ordained and unordained. Both shared the same basic activity. In *Thinking About Things*, Farley put it this way: “I concluded that there was at the general level a distinctive theological activity common to laity, church leaders, and teachers in seminaries, a thinking about and critical response to a variety of life situations in and through the resources and narratives of faith.”<sup>10</sup> Hopefully, the archbishop had acquired additional skill in theological thinking, but that was not necessarily the case.

Edward Farley’s *Thinking About Things* is an intellectual biography well worth the time and effort. As a theologian, Farley spent his time examining the foundations of theological education. For good or for ill, his analysis changed the course of much mainstream theological education in this country. *Thinking about Things* gives us important insights into a seminal thinker and his work. Incidentally, despite all of Farley’s worries about his style, this book is a good read.

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10. Ibid., 261.





# America's Changing Religious and Cultural Landscape and its Implications for Theological Education

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*ABSTRACT: This essay explores the changes in American culture that have made the very notion of religious communities and religious leadership an increasing challenge. Gathering, sustaining, and leading a congregation requires different assumptions and skills than when ATS was founded. Despite the difficulties, however, religious communities are essential, both to the faith and spiritual lives of their participants and to the well-being of the communities in which they are located.*

In the early 1960s, few religious leaders probably realized quite what a turning point had been reached in American culture. At that point, the postwar glow of growth was still intact, with the baby boom just winding down. Church attendance was still at all-time highs, and the system of denominational organization that had been established a half-century before was reaching full maturity. Catholics were emerging into the mainstream of American culture, and each religious group thought it could count on a well-established organizational and cultural clergy pipeline from youth group to denominational college to seminary and back to the pulpit, perhaps with a detour for some time in a postcollege denominational mission posting. Whether things ever worked quite this smoothly is hard to reconstruct at this distance, but there is little doubt that when this journal was begun 50 years ago, ATS occupied a more predictable organizational and cultural world than the setting in which we do our work today.

There are many changes on which we could focus—financial challenges and declining enrollments in many schools, the changing demographics and financial challenges of students themselves, or the erosion of connections between denominations and their seminaries—but I want to focus this brief essay around two kinds of issues. First I will explore the changes in

American culture that have made the very notion of religious communities and religious leadership an increasing challenge. Why does it seem so hard to gather and sustain a congregation these days? Second, I will argue that, despite the difficulties, religious communities are essential, not to be discarded as irrelevant. I will close with some reflections on meeting the leadership and educational challenges of gathering those communities.

## **Changes in American culture**

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One of the most startling changes in the last two decades has been the “rise of the nones,” as The Pew Research Center’s Religion and Public Life project titled its report on the growing number of religiously unaffiliated people. One in five adult Americans now responds “none” to the ques-

“One in five adult Americans now responds “none” to the question of religious identification, and among young adults, that ratio is one in three.

tion of religious identification, and among young adults, that ratio is one in three. As recently as the early 1990s, the number of adult non-affiliates was less than 10 percent, so this does represent a significant and rapid rise. Those who have long and eagerly awaited the decline of religion in “exceptional” America have celebrated with I-told-you-so fervor, while religious leaders have tended to console themselves with

the reality that few of the nonaffiliates are really hard-core atheists. People in the churches, in fact, often cite the rising chorus of talk about spirituality as a call to abandon declining institutions and join the seekers in pursuit of inner wisdom. Perhaps the nones have rejected religion for good reason, and we should join them in seeking spirituality.

It is a bit difficult, however, to discern just what to make of that “spiritual-but-not-religious” talk that seems so pervasive. Whatever it means, the people in that category are not the same as the nones. Only about a third of the spiritual but not religious are unaffiliated; half attend worship with at least some regularity, two-thirds say religion is at least somewhat important to them, 70 percent pray at least occasionally, and nearly all of them believe in God. There is even a conservative evangelical version of this based on the notion that what matters is one’s relationship with Jesus,

not one's membership in a religion. The vast majority of the people who say they are spiritual also say they are religious, and even the ones who say they aren't are likely to look religious by most conventional measures.

Are the unaffiliated, then, spiritual seekers? Actually, no. Pew describes them as "nothing in particulars." They are no more likely to believe in "alternative" spiritualities than are Christians and other affiliates, and when asked if they are looking for a religious or spiritual connection, they say no. If religious leaders expect this population to wander back to church someday, that is probably not a good bet. Nor is it a good bet to think that they have deep spiritual insight that is the future of the faith. Based on these surveys and on my own research, if I had to describe the people who claim to be spiritual but do not want to be called religious, I would say that they are open to the transcendent dimension in life and fairly sure that we aren't alone in the universe, but they have very little in their lives that actively connects them with a language for describing that or with practices that encourage it. They are lurking around the edges of religious traditions—often for political reasons as much as for religious ones. They have scant religious upbringing and few experiences of their own to discredit religious horror stories they see in the news; and if that is what religion is, they want no part of it.

“[The “unaffiliated”] have scant religious upbringing and few experiences of their own to discredit what they see in the news; and if that is what religion is, they want no part of it.

How did they get so disconnected? What church leaders in the 1960s had not quite seen yet was just what a transition we were entering. The “question-authority” generation may have finally settled down in the '70s and '80s, and they may have occasionally brought their children to church, but many of those children (today's young adults) never got the sustained religious education, tied to a single set of parents and siblings, that had characterized the earlier religious boom. Many of the social and cultural anchors that had historically sustained parish life had already begun to shift in the 1960s.

While residential mobility has happened at a roughly steady rate since World War II, recent declines in home ownership and recent decreases in

job stability have combined to make shifting memberships an even more constant fact of life for congregations. For young adults, the rates of mobility are much higher than for older adults, with one in six moving across county or state lines in each five-year period. With job markets and career paths far more unpredictable and relationships far less settled, young adults have fewer commitments to keep them in one place and fewer well-worn paths leading toward a congregation.

For all mobile urban dwellers, the nature of “community” is much less tied to geography than it was even for the suburban residents of the 1950s and '60s. The people who constitute a network of emotional support and everyday connection may be constituted around common interests and shared experiences more than blood and land. “Community” is something to be constructed rather than inherited, and that applies to congregations as well. People who live in cities have as many family and friendship ties and help each other out in similar ways to rural dwellers, but their ties are not geography based, and they may be maintained as much through phone, text, and Facebook as through face-to-face contact. In part, young adults are disconnected from congregations in much the same way they are disconnected from other institutions, and they are potentially connected to congregations to the extent that these new forms of connection become part of congregational life.

One of the other significant shifts in the American cultural landscape was also just on the horizon in the early 1960s—namely, immigration reform. The 1965 immigration law radically increased the flow of immigrants and dramatically shifted their points of origin. By the end of the century, the United States was home to as big a proportion of immigrants as it had been a century earlier, but rather than coming almost entirely from Europe, our new immigrant population began to bring a broader array of ethnic and religious diversity into our midst. We have become visibly aware that we are not just a Christian and Jewish country. At least as important, however, are the effects within Christianity itself. These new migrant flows have largely been from countries where Christianity is the dominant religion; and in other countries, it is Christians who are disproportionately present among the emigrants. So, while it is true that we are increasingly multireligious, it is also true that the larger trend is what Stephen Warner calls “the de-Europeanization of American Christianity.” Some of the fastest growing segments of American religion are Korean Methodists and Presbyterians, Salvadoran Pentecostals, and Mexican Catholics.

Both in seminary classrooms and in the communities graduates will serve, the image of a Euro-American male pastor serving a stable community of ethnically similar, two-parent families is now radically out of sync with reality (but amazingly tenacious as a cultural memory). In addition to the changing ethnic and religious composition of American communities, the very shape of family life has changed as well. At the end of the 1950s, half of all American households consisted of parents with young children; today that proportion is one in five. While the number of nonaffiliated people has risen in most demographic groups, straight married people with children, even those in the youngest cohorts, are almost as likely to be affiliated today as they were in the 1960s—there just aren't nearly as many such families out there. There are more blended families, of course, and families with same-sex parents; but most of all, there are more people living alone and more living as couples, both before and after children. In fact, the fastest-growing segment of the population is those over 80 years of age. Retired people today can expect to live for two more decades, but the culture, the health-care system, and the churches are not really ready for that reality.

All of these changes have wreaked havoc on the ways people have thought about forming communities and on the expectation that a congregation would be a central part of that community. As people have moved from place to place and job to job and relationship to relationship, the task of creating networks of support and mutual responsibility has become increasingly challenging. All of these changes have sent an increasingly disparate assortment of students to theological schools—young and old, shaped in congregations themselves and not, representing the increasingly

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diverse range of families, cultures, and theologies that make up American communities. When they think about the communities they have come from and the communities they will lead, there are many models in their heads.

## **Religious communities are essential**

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Despite the challenges, however, the things that happen in local congregations are more important than ever—to the individuals in them, to the larger society in which we all live, and to the faith traditions in which theological educators participate.

Even the nones agree that congregations and other faith-based organizations are important to the well-being of our society. Congregations are often the only spaces in which otherwise marginalized populations can celebrate their own cultures and organize their own public life. Congregations and their community partners are also critical players in the increasingly frayed safety net that protects the most vulnerable. They not only provide services, but they also mobilize advocacy and model what it means to take care of one another for the common good. People who participate give more, vote more, and volunteer more. The work congregations do even extends to mobilizing the energies of people who merely have friends who participate. When congregations are not present and healthy, there is a big hole in the overall social fabric.

Churches and synagogues are not just good voluntary community organizations, of course, modeling and passing along traditions of virtue that are critical to our larger culture. They are also the places where people are invited into an experience of transcendence and a relationship with the divine. If we care about the presence of faith in the world, the work of theological education must continue to include attention to the formation and leadership of collective religious gatherings, whatever form they may take. My own recent research on spirituality in everyday life has convinced me yet again that congregating matters. A life story that has spiritual content and direction is much more likely to come from someone who is an active participant in a religious community. For all the talk about people being spiritual but not religious and for all the lore about finding God in the woods, I can tell you that there are very few people out there who are truly pursuing a spiritual way of life without the help of a religious community of some sort.

People who carry their faith into the world are people who experience and practice the presence of faith in shared work and shared conversations. When communities gather around ritual and learning and common labor, they provide the arenas in which spiritual conversation and spiritual relationships happen. Those who are only moderately involved in organized participation get some of this benefit, but it is the active participant (no matter what tradition) who reaps the benefits of these fertile religious conversational spaces. While preaching, music, and education for their children are the threshold experiences that keep many people coming at a fairly regular pace, it is participation in small-group activities that provides the space for making the deeper connections—to other people and by way of the conversations with those people, between faith and life. Those who are on the margins of religious life, on the other hand, and still somewhat connected but inactive, are more likely alienated because a congregation has failed in its relational work than because they have ceased to believe. Connections and conversations are the building blocks of the new kinds of religious communities our best students will learn to lead.

### **Meeting the challenges of today's spiritual communities**

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Today's culture makes it exceedingly difficult to get people in the door of any religious organization, and the unsettledness of all our connections is hard soil in which to grow any sort of community. Being a religious leader no longer means stepping into a ready-made community; it means building one. Simply teaching the basic skills of preaching and teaching will not help students assemble the disparate pilgrims moving through the city to hear what they have to say. Simply ensuring adequate scriptural and theological knowledge may or may not help a student hear the halting questions of a young adult who has never been to church. Simply providing an accredited religious credential will not matter if the people who need to be gathered into a community have never heard of your denomination (let alone The Association of Theological Schools). All the things seminaries have learned to do are still essential, but they are no longer sufficient. Today's religious leaders have to invite people into a spiritual community where worship introduces connections to God, fellowship introduces connections to one another, and service introduces connections to a larger mission in the world.



In today's religious and cultural landscape, the people who leave our theological schools cannot assume that the spiritual community will already be there or that it will be healthy and intact. Both repair and new construction may be needed. As soon as a group has been built, it will have to adjust to the constant flux of new people and new challenges. Blessing people who leave will be as much a part of the task as welcoming new people who arrive. Networking by all means possible will be as much a part of a leader's toolkit as was the mimeograph machine of old. Although it may be much more difficult to gather a community, it is more critical than ever. The work of theological education is no less necessary—just different.

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# The Change We Need: Race and Ethnicity in Theological Education

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*ABSTRACT: The presence of people of color in significant numbers in predominately white theological institutions has placed a new set of dynamics in the midst of (1) academic theological conversation, (2) the teaching of the subject matter of theological education, and (3) the formation process of students. We are only beginning to assess the cost of adaptation both for theological institutions and for scholars of color. The question now is whether institutions will move beyond a facile management of diversity to a productive embodiment of diversity in their educational processes and their common life.*

## Introduction

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Look at the photos. You can see the change in those yearly pictures. The bodies of racial and ethnic minorities and women now more heavily sprinkle the formerly monochromatic images of a graduating class and a learned faculty, both formerly comprised primarily and often exclusively of serious-looking white men. Fifty years is a long time in the life of an institution, but theological institutions count time slowly where recent (as in an idea, or a scholarly work, or an argument) can mean anywhere from 20 to 200 years. So this change in the bodies that inhabit theological institutions is truly a recent change and a painfully slow one for many institutions. The invasion of predominately white theological institutions by racial and ethnic minorities is one of the single most important changes in theological education in the latter half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. That change has had a profound effect on the ecologies of institutions, placing a new set of dynamics in the midst of (1) academic theological conversation, (2) the teaching life in the theological academy, and (3) the formation process of students.

## **New interlocutors in old conversations/old interlocutors in new conversations**

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Theological education is not a new thing for people of color, especially in the United States. For example, theological education has been going on in historically black institutions since before the turn of the last century, and there have been formally trained black and brown Christian intellectuals from the very beginning of the colonial moment. What constitutes the new in the last 50 years is the unanticipated presence of racial and ethnic minorities in places both spatial and conceptual where their voices had not been imagined. Conversation is the life blood of academic life, whether it is conversations scholars are having in the still silence of their research or through literary interaction with others in print or in face-to-face meetings. The blood of the theological academy has changed thanks to the presence of minorities, but this new blood does not yet circulate with ease through the body. Racial and ethnic voices emerged as an interruption within the scholarly conversations of the theological academy, and initially they made visible one dynamic that had always been present in the wider academy and society in America—the dynamic of intellectual assimilation and scholarly mimicry. That dynamic may be put crudely with a question: Was the nonwhite scholar to be seen as (for example) a New Testament scholar who just happens to be black or brown and/or female or was that scholar's work marked by and defined through his or her race and gender?

This dynamic, which pivoted on the idea of authentic/inauthentic identities, had the unintended consequence of making visible the racial subject in theological work (that is, the identity of the scholars and not just their scholarship) and brought white identity into view, no longer concealed inside of claims to objectivity or universality. This dynamic blossomed into a wider set of issues that now highlight the troubled status of academic theological conversation. Racial and ethnic minorities have witnessed the fragmentation of conversation. That fragmentation is not due primarily to the explosion of knowledge, or the increased specialization within the theological disciplines, or the increased number of scholars entering the fields. That fragmentation is due to the disjointed lines of interlocutors now at play in the theological academy. Who is talking to whom? Who is listening? Under what conditions are people speaking? These have become very complicated questions in scholarly work, and scholars of color are caught

in very serious negotiation regarding the lines of communication. On one side you have scholars who are trying to think of the constitutive realities of their subject matter in relation to the constitutive realities of identities and of contemporary social structures, and on the other side you have scholars who resist such a concurrence, preferring to imagine their subject matter enclosed within its own internal logics and order of knowing that are only compromised by identity matters. Indeed, quite a few scholars on this latter side imagine a continuing decline in their scholarly fields because of such wrongheaded subjective inquiry. Both groups of scholars are concerned with the advancement and clarification of knowledge in their fields, but the kind of conversation necessary for the furtherance of knowledge is not clear to everyone. Even at this moment, there remains a racial/ethnic/gender divide in the conversations of the theological academy with people of color and their allies in one discursive orbit and significant numbers of white scholars in another discursive orbit. Each recognizes the existence of the other, sometimes in polite scholarly acknowledgment but rarely in shared intellectual exploration. The question now is whether there will emerge a generation of scholars that can embody new forms of interaction and intellectual exchange that mark a new reality of shared conversation and projects that enhances knowledge.

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### Living in someone else's house

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Teachers of color entering the theological academy entered curricular houses and institutional ecologies not built with them in mind, often asking the abiding question, When and where do I enter? The usefulness of the house or all its aesthetic pleasures was not in question. The real question was the status of the new occupants. The presenting question in regard to institutional ecologies and curricular structures was and is the

cost of adaptation. What does it cost the scholar of color and what does it cost the institution to adapt to this new life together? Making an old house fit new occupants is exhausting work with mixed results. Such has been

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the case with minority scholars in predominately white institutions. One of the untold stories of theological education in the last 60 years has been the painful struggle of scholars of color to thrive in these institutions. There is a trail of tears of minority faculty members that matches a trail of missteps and backward steps by institutions. At issue has been the willingness of institutions to receive fully the changes that minority faculty members bring to the articulation of their disciplines, to the teaching of their subject matter, and to administrative leadership. What comes along with those changes is the rearticulation of the mission of the school. What has also been at issue is the willingness of racial and ethnic minority faculty members to

take on the missional trajectories of the institution in ways that announce deep continuity with its most cherished hopes.

What complicates further this new life together is the powerful inertia embedded in predominately white theological institutions toward recapitulating a centered white male subject as the abiding image of education being done well. Racial and ethnic faculty (and students) struggle against the phantasm of the white male in the classroom. That haunting presence of an authorial norm often invades faculty-student interactions and the way minority faculty members are positioned in relation to their discipline and their teaching. Many are pressed toward shadow boxing with an image they cannot defeat. Worse yet, faculty members in general are tempted toward a kind of phantom assimilation, a spirit possession through which they mimic the comportment and gestures of a mythical

white male subject in the way they articulate both their disciplines and their teaching. In truth, theological institutions count on a reality of assimilation in order to sustain their theological and pedagogical traditions. That assimilation, however, when embedded in the historical trajectories of white male subject formation, works against the healthy cultivation of a faculty and tempts some toward racial and gender mimicry.

What constitutes a discipline being presented well and teaching being done well is an open question in the theological academy. That question has now emerged with a new intensity in institutions with an increased presence of nonwhite faculty. This new intensity is due in great measure to the crumbling assumptions regarding both *who* guarantees excellent teaching (a white male teacher) and *what* guarantees high quality theological education. That latter guarantee was rooted in the imperial position that theological instruction enjoyed in Western educational systems. Gone is the day when theological studies (broadly understood) enjoyed its foundational status in the formation of a cultivated individual. Theological studies was woven into liberal arts education in such a way as to make its pedagogical justifications invisible and made it unnecessary to articulate its goals in formation. But the form of excellence in scholarship and teaching and student cultivation is now precisely what demands clarification through a new conversation. However, not many theological faculties have found their way toward sustaining a productive conversation regarding the form of excellence in theological education. That conversation has not gained significant traction because faculties have been slow to articulate to themselves the lines of continuity and discontinuity of disciplinary and pedagogical vision that are implicit and sometimes explicit with a diverse faculty.

Racial and ethnic faculty members often find themselves in an interrupted status. The real conversation about who they are and what their work means for the very nature of the school's educational endeavor is not happening. The real conversation about the difference their scholarship and presence make to the ecology of the classroom is not happening. The necessary conversation about serious reform to the curricular vision of the school because of their intellectual presence will not happen. And the important conversation about how the faculty together must carry forward the missional aspirations of the institution as new wine in new wineskins is also not happening. A perennial symptom of this interrupted status is the continuing practice of placing the teaching work of racial and

ethnic faculty members in ancillary roles in relation to the core pedagogical thrust of the curriculum. That ghettoized positioning shows poor institutional self-reflexivity in its thinking about how it transitions from its past to its future. It also marks the ambiguity that continues to cover minority presence in many institutions where it has not been made clear that their intellectual work and presence is a welcomed and celebrated good thing.

The issue here is related to but different from the resistance that many scholars of color experienced as the first generation of minority scholars at their institutions. The issue here has to do with their presence in relation to how an institution thinks of itself and understands its work in society and the world. In this regard, the intellectual presence of racial and ethnic faculty members has not penetrated to the core of institutional reflection on good scholarship, teaching, and student formation. The question now in this regard is, What real difference does racial and ethnic (and gender) difference make for how theological institutions do their reflective work especially with a view toward student formation?

### **Forming students in which century?**

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Many predominately white theological institutions have now had several generations of students of color move through their halls. Indeed most of the racial and ethnic faculty members of today were the minority students taught in many cases by those first generation minority faculty members. Together they share a powerful legacy of successful adaptation to their institutions in ways that allowed them to make productive use of their theological training. Adaptation, however, has not thus far meant the kind of transformation of institutional ethos that would create a deep collaboration of formation goals for diverse students. The weight that borders on being a burden of figuring out how to adapt the theological formation that takes place in the institution to preparing them to face the real needs of racial and ethnic communities remains on the shoulders of students. This burden is beyond the usual challenge of translating the world of theological discourse within common everyday language and merging the knowledge formed in the academy with the good wisdom of indigenous communities. This burden draws students of color into the exhausting task of trying to map the complexities of life in the racial world across the complexities of theological formation without enough help.

That exhausting task is made even more problematic by its fragmentation within the theological academy that aligns minority students with their own private labors, African American, Hispanic, Asian, African, and so forth—each invited to figure out the relevance of his or her theological formation for his or her own communities. Very few theological institutions have at this moment developed a strategic vision of deep collaboration that pulls the burden off the bodies of minority students and returns it to the shared work of the entire community. That work of helping minority students in this regard tends to fall heavily on racial and ethnic minority faculty members who are yet pulled into the relentless work of trying to establish the conditions for relevance. What are the conceptual conditions necessary for the work of the theological academy to be relevant to the communities that draw my concern? What are the conditions necessary for my scholarly work to be relevant to the concerns of my communities? The value of such questions is not at issue, only their reach. These should be the questions of the entire theological community, but they tend to be isolated to the faculty and students of color. That isolation penetrates many institutions, leaving untapped the potential to bring various minority students along with white students into a shared project of collaborative formation that might bring their communities together.

Ironically, this lack of collaborative formation continues to stunt the growth of white students, many of whom recognize that they must be able to function within the new multicultural realities of society and who don't want to embody and perform a preferred homogeneity through their ministries and by their lives. Developing a vision of collaborative formation

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requires institutions to reflect on the foundational image(s) that drives their work of formation. Many institutions that are beginning to challenge the idea of a center/margin in the classroom have not begun to challenge that conceptual arrangement in the formation process of students. Many schools opt out of such work, preferring to leave to minority faculty members and students the strange work of creating a parallel universe of spiritual, ministerial, and intellectual formation that runs alongside the central work of the institution. The question now is whether theological schools can more deeply collaborate with racial and ethnic students concerning their formation needs and if they can envisage formation that cross-pollinates and interpenetrates spiritual visions so that all students are invited into a truly shared project of cultivation that is not assimilation into a white norm. The hope in this regard would be to cultivate in students an ability to foster such collaboration in and between faith communities.

## **Conclusion**

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What a prospective student of color will see if she visits a theological school today would be markedly different and better than what she would have seen five or six decades ago. Yet what she would see is a very serious work in progress. Theological institutions in North America (and the Western world) are still moving beyond their colonialist groundings. They are, however, yet to shake free from their segregationalist habits of mind. The question remains whether they can and will start to imagine with the multitude, that is, imagine a diverse church and diverse communities not to manage but to embody through their educational processes and their common life. Theological education in the Western world has entered a new stage where it must develop authentically decolonial habits of mind that transform theological schools into places that educate people toward one another and not simply beside one another.

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# From the Last Fifty Years and into the Next Fifty

*Justo L. González*

*Association for Hispanic Theological Education*

*ABSTRACT: The author reflects on race and ethnicity—specifically Hispanic-Latino/a—in theological education from the perspectives of the past, present, and future. The past, he says, was filled with numerous obstacles stemming from language barriers to the lack of accreditation of Latin American seminaries. Decades of changing North American demographics, however, have seen the development of alternative routes for ordination that many Hispanics and other minorities follow. The author asserts that in order for theological schools to be successful in the future, they will need to adapt to the new forms of theological education and ordination now emerging.*

As *Theological Education* marks half a century of publication, I have been invited to reflect on the developments I have seen during my career in theological education, and on what I foresee as the future shape of theological education in North America. I must confess that I am more comfortable with the first task than with the second, for it is usually riskier to foretell than to “post-tell”! And, even when it comes to the past, as a historian I am well aware that history is always written from the present where we stand and the future for which we hope or which we dread!

## Past experiences

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As I look first at the past, the changes I have witnessed in theological education have been many. Probably the most notable and most widespread among them has been the growing presence and participation of women in theological studies. There has also been a marked increase in the number of various minorities—particularly Korean Americans—involved in advanced theological education. But since others are better qualified than I to deal with such experiences, I shall focus my remarks on the Hispanic/Latino experience and presence.

My career did not begin in North America, but in Cuba in 1958, and therefore as I reflect on the changes I have witnessed in North America, I

must put them in a worldwide context. Within that context, changes have been dramatic. When I first went to seminary, only two in our entire class could read English with facility; and yet, most of our textbooks—and more than 95 percent of our library—were in English. Most of the few library books that were in Spanish were rabidly anti-Protestant. The rest were

mostly translated from English. When I suggested to our professor of church history that he ought to write a textbook in Spanish and from a Latino perspective, he flatly told me that such a thing would never be feasible, because the number of prospective readers would be minimal. Three years later when I came to the United States to study for my PhD at Yale, I was told that Spanish would not count as one of the modern languages required, for it was “not a theological language.” When I went to teach in Puerto Rico, the institution where I taught, the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico, was not accredited

“*In the early 1970s, I knew of no other tenured Hispanic colleague in a Protestant theological seminary; in the 1990s they had already become more than a handful of closely knit colleagues; and by now I do not know all of them and cannot even count them.*”

by what was then called the American Association of Theological Schools, even though roughly a third of our graduates were serving in the United States—in fact, no institution in Puerto Rico had such accreditation. Then I came to teach in the United States, and as far as I knew, I was the only tenured Latino professor in any Protestant seminary in the nation.

It was at that time, in the 1970s, that things began to change. Several schools began Hispanic programs. ATS showed that it was aware of the growing presence of Hispanics in North America and hired Cecilio Arrastía to look into the matter. He gathered a few of us for a number of consultations, out of which several proposals emerged. But, at least from our point of view as outsiders, it seemed that after his departure from ATS, his work was filed away, awaiting a more propitious time.

It was also in the general society and in the church at large that things were changing, as the Office of the Census repeatedly showed. In almost every major denomination in the United States, Hispanic caucuses began

to emerge. The late Orlando Costas, a pioneer of Latino theological education in the United States, declared that the 1970s would be “the decade of Hispanics.” His prediction didn’t quite come true, but the late ’70s did see much activity among Latinos and Latinas seeking to improve their theological education as well as their participation in the denominations to which they belonged. This movement cut across denominational lines, and I experienced its vigor as I found myself addressing and meeting with Hispanic Methodists one week, Roman Catholics the next, and Pentecostals the next. By the early 1990s, first the Roman Catholic Church, then The United Methodist Church, and soon several other denominations, developed and funded comprehensive plans for Hispanic ministries.

Also in the wider world of theology, things were changing. Theologies of liberation coming out of Latin America gained a foothold in the curricula of several institutions in North America. Part of my own agenda as a historian was to gain their rightful place in the history of Christianity for such names as Ximenes de Cisneros, Las Casas, Teresa of Ávila, Vitoria, Pedro Claver, and Suárez—and eventually, at least in some measure, I did succeed. Several graduate schools began accepting Spanish and Portuguese as fulfilling the requirements that previously could only be met with German and French. Eventually a growing number of professors began studying Spanish in order to read materials that were becoming increasingly important in their own fields.

During that time, partly with the support of foundations such as The Pew Charitable Trusts, Lilly Endowment, and the Luce Foundation, a number of programs emerged seeking to support various aspects of Hispanic Theological Education: the Hispanic Summer Program (HSP), the Association for Hispanic Theological Education (AETH), and the Hispanic Theological Initiative (HTI). All of these programs continue to this day.

## **Reflections on the present**

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This brings us to the present. The degree to which this present is different can be illustrated by a simple comparison: in the early 1970s, I knew of no other tenured Hispanic colleague in a Protestant theological seminary; in the 1990s they had already become more than a handful of closely knit colleagues; and by now I do not know all of them and cannot even count them.

But the changes that are taking place in the churches and in theological education go far beyond these horizons. By and large, the major

“Growing numbers—in the case of Latinos and Latinas, thousands—are being ordained and given pastoral responsibilities without benefit of formal seminary education. Most of them belong to denominations that do not require such studies, and others belong to denominations that, while normally requiring them, offer alternative routes.

denominations that have traditionally required a seminary education for ordination are also the denominations whose membership is declining. The main exception is the Roman Catholic Church, which is constantly increasing its files with immigrants from Latin America, the Philippines, and Southeast Asia. Many of the denominations—mostly Pentecostal—that are growing have not traditionally required seminary education as a prerequisite for ordination. And what is true in the United States is even more so in other areas of the world, particularly Latin America and Africa.

It would be easy to blame seminary education for the declining membership of mainline Protestantism—and many do. But in this they delude themselves. The underlying causes in the declining membership of such churches have to do with changing demographics and the churches' inability to reach the new populations—or, more accurately, their unwillingness to change in order to be able to reach them.

But even so, this situation is affecting theological education in ways that go far beyond the changes propounded by those who claim that seminary “will take away your faith.” Most schools of theology sponsored and owned by major denominations are seeing a decline in the number of candidates for ordination in those denominations. When it comes to seminary enrollment, this decline is made more noticeable since most major Protestant denominations have developed alternative routes for ordination—routes that many Hispanics and other minorities follow. At the same time, many leaders in denominations that traditionally have not required seminary studies for ordination are seeing the need for more education, and increasing numbers are applying to theological schools of denominations not their own—even more so, since most of their denominations do not have seminaries.

One result is that the practical monopoly of theological education that ATS-accredited schools and programs had 50 years ago is now broken. Growing numbers—in the case of Latinos and Latinas, thousands—are

being ordained and given pastoral responsibilities without benefit of formal seminary education. Most of them belong to denominations that do not require such studies, and others belong to denominations that, while normally requiring them, offer alternative routes.

Another result is that an increasing proportion of those enrolled in seminaries and schools of theology are either people whose denominations do not require them to study, but who feel the need to do so, or lay people—particularly Roman Catholics—who wish to practice various forms of lay ministry that are becoming more important with the decline in the number of ordained personnel.

## **And back to the future**

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As we move deeper into the twenty-first century, the manner in which particular seminaries and schools of theology respond to this new situation will be a fundamental factor in their viability, growth, and sense of mission. Schools that depend on the constant support of their denominations for their annual budgets will find that, as they have fewer students from the denomination itself, such support will also decline—unless they now have the foresight to begin working at the difficult task of convincing their supporters that the school has a wider mission beyond the confines of the denomination. Schools that are largely dependent on endowment funds may not face the same crisis, but unless they develop new policies and curricula, they will find themselves increasingly irrelevant. The same is true of schools where an elitist ethos prevails—schools, for instance, that pride themselves on their tough admission standards or on the renown of their world-famous scholars. To state it bluntly, the worst problem that a school may have at a time such as ours is to have no problem and therefore not to feel the urgent need for change.

On the other hand, there are measures that can be taken now in order to avoid such dire consequences. The first of these is to view theological education not as something we do in seminary, but rather as a continuum that stretches from catechetical and Sunday school to the most sophisticated levels (a continuum at which the first levels will need to be stressed more and more as we move into a highly secularized society). This means that, while there is a place for highly academic and sophisticated programs of study and research, that place is only justified by its connection with and participation in the entire continuum. (And it means also that faculty are not

to be evaluated only on the basis of the judgment of other scholars, but also on the basis of the relevance of their work to the entire continuum.) Obviously, in order to achieve this it will be necessary not only for seminaries and schools of theology to abandon tendencies to elitism, but also for Bible institutes and other similar programs to overcome prejudices and ideologies that make it difficult for them to become part of the necessary continuum. Second, as a consequence of the first, schools of theology must seek ways to encourage programs of theological education at other levels, to help train their teachers, and to make it easier for graduates of those other levels to pursue seminary studies. (An important step in this direction is the present conversation between ATS and AETH regarding the certification of Bible institutes.) Third, since an increasing number of students will already be engaged in ministry before they enter seminary, more thought must be given to an action-reflection-action pedagogical method. (For instance, should students in church history be evaluated merely on the basis of how much history they know, or rather on the basis of how well they can teach what they learn and make it relevant to a congregation and its ministry?) Fourth, curricula and pedagogical methods must be developed that are particularly relevant for those whose denominations do not require that they study in a seminary or have an MDiv before being ordained, and who therefore come to school both with a profound conviction of the value of studying and with years of experience that must be affirmed and appreciated before being also evaluated and enriched (which a number of schools are beginning to do by offering alternative master's degrees, although not always exploring or instituting different methods of teaching and evaluation).

The future here envisioned may be either dim or bright. It is dim if we consider our schools as they now are organized. But it is bright if we take into account the many efforts already underway and converging on the points listed above. Theological education in the wider sense will always be part of the *esse* of the church. It is up to seminaries and schools of theology to find their place in the forms of theological education that are now emerging.

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# *Theological Education at Fifty: Then and Now*

*Stephen R. Graham and Eliza Smith Brown*  
*The Association of Theological Schools*

*ABSTRACT: As Theological Education celebrates 50 years and 141 issues, two journal editors reflect on both continuity and change in editorial content since 1964. They highlight recurrent themes that continue to engage and often perplex theological educators. In addition, however, they identify two overarching trends that represent a marked change from a half-century ago: a growing diversity of persons, programs, and practices, and the increasing complexity of the schools, their operations, and expectations placed upon them.*

## **The first issue in 1964**

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When the first issue of *Theological Education* was published in Autumn 1964, editor Jesse Ziegler lamented “a notable lack of communication within the theological education enterprise,” which was particularly regrettable given the work’s “basic unity of purpose.” The new journal was intended primarily for a public that at the time numbered some 1,700 teachers and administrators within the American Association of Theological Schools (AATS, the earlier incarnation of ATS). The broader audience included trustees; nonmember Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish schools in North America; and theological educators “in distant places.”<sup>1</sup>

The editorial policy for the fledgling journal has changed very little during its 50 years in publication, calling for most articles to be solicited by invitation and some issues to be devoted to research reports. Many of the topics identified in 1964 for “future consideration” were notably similar to topics that continue to consume the attention of theological educators: “models for theological education,” “relation of theological education to other professional education,” “who are the theological students,”

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1. Jesse H. Ziegler, “Editorial Introduction,” *Theological Education* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1964): 1.



“education of laymen” [sic], or “location of school as related to purposes of theological education.”

Through the years, topics addressed in *Theological Education* have addressed the wide range of dramatic changes within the church, broader society, higher education in general, and theological education more particularly. Other emphases highlight the remarkable continuity within the enterprise of theological education.

In an essay in the inaugural issue that could have been written today—with a few modifications in language to reflect the changing demographics of theological school faculties and students—John Bright, professor of Hebrew and the interpretation of the Old Testament at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, addressed some of the tensions between academy and practice in “The Academic Teacher and the Practical Needs of the Clergy.” Written at a time when many of those who served on theological school

faculties had extensive experience in congregational ministry, his insights are particularly relevant for faculty members today whose preparation is much less likely to include ministry in congregations.

Bright addressed “the tension between the intellectual canons of scholarship and the practical concerns of vocational training.” This tension is one to which most current theological

“*Faculty members continue to feel the tension of needing more time with students who often bring less ecclesial and academic formation than their predecessors, while many institutions seek to shorten programs to make them more appealing and accessible to students.*”

educators can relate. Bright also argued for more time to form students to meet the wide variety of demands they would face in ministry, suggesting that the basic program for ministry preparation be lengthened from three to four years. Faculty members continue to feel the tension of needing more time with students who often bring less ecclesial and academic formation



than their predecessors, while many institutions seek to shorten programs to make them more appealing and accessible to students.<sup>2</sup>

Other articles in the inaugural issue addressed tensions that also continue to confront theological schools today. For example, how does the intellectual work of theological faculties relate (or not) to the intellectual work of their peers in the larger academic world? Should more theological schools in the United States and Canada follow the European model and find their location as departments of universities?<sup>3</sup> What is it, exactly, that unites the variety of schools that are currently members in the Association? How does the Association define and evaluate quality between those schools that are part of research universities and standalone schools that are primarily oriented to the church?

How do schools both *serve* the needs of the church and *lead* the church by preparing both “priests” to serve and “prophets” to envision a different future? How should schools today discern between what leaders in the church say they want and what those in the schools believe congregations and other ministries need? As one article put it, schools should educate clergy “not for the present expectations of the churches, not the men [sic] the churches want or think they need, but the men [sic] they ought to have.”<sup>4</sup>

Finally, how does community worship fit within the formation of students for ministry? Schools from a variety of traditions continue to wrestle with the role of worship within the contexts of theological study, and the answers to this question are profoundly shaped by the differing missions of schools within the Association. In 1964, one author advocated development of accrediting standards that would hold schools accountable to producing graduates who lead an authentic life of faith and devotion.<sup>5</sup>

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2. John Bright, “The Academic Teacher and the Practical Needs of the Clergy,” *Theological Education* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1964): 35, 39, 48. Because it remained “amazingly relevant,” Bright’s article was republished in a 2009 issue of the journal dedicated to faculty vocation and governance: *Theological Education* 44, no. 2 (2009): 113–128.

3. Stanley Brice Frost, “The Theologian and the World of Contemporary Thought,” *Theological Education* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1964): 12–13.

4. George W. Webber, “The Christian Minister and the Social Problems of the Day,” *Theological Education* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1964): 23, 29.

5. J. Robert Nelson, “The Seminary—Academy and Chapel,” *Theological Education* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1964): 57, 61.

## The journal evolves

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Over the ensuing years, *Theological Education* continued as a quarterly (with additional supplements added in some years) until 1977, when frequency shifted to two issues per year. The themes over the years reflect the recurrent—or timeless—topics that continue to engage and often perplex theological educators. An ongoing concern has been the structuring of theological education to meet the needs of communities of faith and the lives of individuals within them. The second issue of the journal, published in winter 1965, was themed *Models of Theological Education for the Last Third of the Twentieth Century*, and the topic reappeared in 1973. The “Editorial Introduction” for the 1965 issue began by stating “There is little necessity to remind those engaged in or responsible for theological education that we are in a revolutionary era when many of the landmarks in the world that we have known have disappeared.” Ziegler continued, “In a dynamic, changing, revolutionary period those responsible for theological education dare not be content to do their work as it was done 50 or even 10 years ago without serious evaluation.”<sup>6</sup> “New” models to which “AATS has given neither explicit nor implicit approval” included adaptations away from “a monastery for single men,” and toward preparation of a growing diversity of people for a growing diversity of ministries, though the understanding of diversity could be limited, as reflected in one author’s statement that “the role of the parsonage woman is just as significant, in its own way, to a viable ministry as is the function of the man.”<sup>7</sup> Additional themes in the 1965 issue on educational models were the engagement of the seminary with the university (with articles emphasizing the necessity of theological schools being “embedded” within university contexts versus another arguing that the seminary is primarily “the church’s school”), collaborations with congregations and other institutions in the educational process, and the growing need for education of laity. AATS Executive Director Charles L. Taylor lamented that the “grim realities of maintaining an organization, absorbing the time of so many, may cause nightmares rather than dreams.” Naming a concern that would reappear at regular intervals,

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6. Jesse H. Ziegler, “Editorial Introduction,” *Theological Education* 1, no. 2 (Winter 1965): 79.

7. Franklin H. Littell, “The Seminary Provides for Dialogue,” *Theological Education* 1, no. 2. (Winter 1965): 79, 84–85.

Taylor noted that the cost of theological education had doubled between 1940 and 1950, had doubled again between 1950 and 1960, and was likely to double again in the 1960s.<sup>8</sup>

The 1973 treatment of educational models included responses to the work of the AATS Resources Planning Commission whose work recommended "Theological Curriculum for the 1970s." Summarizing the work of the Commission from the perspective of the late 1990s, ATS Executive Director Leon Pacala noted that the group had concluded that to meet the challenges facing theological education "would require massive redeployments of institutional resources that would result in clustering theological schools of different theological and confessional traditions in a common physical setting," normally attached to a university.<sup>9</sup> The curriculum would require the resulting theological school clusters to include an average of 92 faculty, a student body of 775, a dramatic increase in salary costs, and "an educational structure that would depart substantially from the traditional three- or four-year seminary program." With its extraordinarily sweeping and expensive conclusions, it is not surprising that schools refused to adopt the Commission's plans. According to Pacala, "it is not an exaggeration to conclude that the report of the Commission fell 'stillborn from the press.'"<sup>10</sup> Alternatives suggested in the 1973 issue of *Theological Education* included a New Testament-based paradigm for seminary education, an educational plan using the ministerial profession as its organizing principle, and a Free Church model based on the distinctive doctrines and ministries of that tradition.<sup>11</sup>

As ATS embarks on a comprehensive four-year project to study educational models and practices, those earlier reflections promise to provide valuable historical perspective. Of most interest, however, is the fact that previous discussions of educational models have largely worked within the framework of the dominant model of higher education and theological education with its general framework of students completing baccalaureate studies and moving directly into graduate theological studies, relocating

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8. Charles L. Taylor, "The Location of Theological Schools," *Theological Education* 1, no. 2 (Winter 1965): 106.

9. Leon Pacala, *The Role of ATS in Theological Education, 1980–1990* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 10.

10. *Ibid.*, 11–12.

11. *Theological Education* 9, no. 2 (Winter 1973).

to campus communities to take their courses, progressing through programs with a relatively consistent group of peers, and giving most of

“Many are now convinced that the discussion of educational models must address more fundamental questions and may require much more radical reconsiderations of educational models and practices.

their time to study of disciplines in curricula that remained very consistent over time. Where the students had come from and their vocational goals were also fairly consistent. In contrast, many are now convinced that the discussion of educational models must address more fundamental questions and may require much more radical reconsiderations of educational models and practices.

Issues both before and after the “Theological Curriculum for the 1970s” plan have addressed curriculum design. Since the beginning years of the journal, schools have

worked with the design of their curricula, with issues of *Theological Education* devoted to curriculum design and revision published in 1966, 1968, 1989, and 2007. In 1966, the editorial introduction titled “Ferment in Curriculum Study” asserted that “even a cursory reading of the historical documents of AATS readily demonstrates that concern for curriculum has stood near the center in the thought of the Association for nearly fifty years.” Concerns behind the attention to curriculum included

- the “claim of *irrelevance*”;
- the “trap of being *practical*”;
- the “*alienation from the pastoral*”;
- the “*compartmentalization and isolation*” of disciplines from one another;
- the “*premature end of study*” with graduation but no continuing education; and
- “*alienation from the world.*”<sup>12</sup>

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12. Jesse H. Ziegler, “Editorial Introduction: Ferment in Curriculum Study,” *Theological Education* 2, no. 3 (Spring 1966), 165–166.

Those concerns and a number of others would continue to face theological school leaders for the ensuing 50 years as well. Also in the 1960s, articles began to address the differences between ministers from Canada and those from the United States.

Contributions engaged concerns of women in theological education in the 1970s with volumes dedicated to this general topic in 1972, 1975, and 2010. The earlier two issues came in the midst of discussions in a number of denominations about the ordination of women, and the 2010 issue reported on a major study of women in theological education led by Barbara Brown Zikmund. The first article by a woman author, Marion M. Kellern, associate professor of Christian education and pastoral theology at Virginia Theological Seminary, appeared in 1965. "The Seminary Wife: Her Role in Community"<sup>13</sup> reveals much about assumptions in that era and also signals the dramatic changes that were to come.

In the wake of the civil rights movement in the United States, theological schools addressed the transitions that were taking place within their institutions, their people, and their constituencies. In the half century of its existence, *Theological Education* has published six issues dedicated to a range of issues affecting racial/ethnic constituencies and the schools. In 1970, the journal published two issues with the issue focus of "The Black Religious Experience and Theological Education" to report on the work of a special committee formed in 1968 by the Association's Executive Committee. The initial issue included papers presented at a conference at Howard University. Speaking about the conference, committee chair C. Shelby Rooks, executive director of the Fund for Theological Education, insisted that "there is the supreme necessity for Black men themselves to define what they are about so that wherever they may be—in Black seminaries or White—their education can be of meaning and relevance in the building of the kingdom for the Black community. That, finally, is why this meeting has been called."<sup>14</sup> A supplemental issue published "The Black Religious Experience and Theological Education for the Seventies: A Report by The Special AATS Committee."<sup>15</sup>

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13. Marion M. Kellern, "The Seminary Wife: Her Role in Community," *Theological Education* 2, no. 1 (Autumn 1965).

14. C. Shelby Rooks, "Why a Conference on the Black Religious Experience?" *Theological Education* 6, no. 3 (Spring 1970): 180.

15. *Theological Education* 6, no. 3, supplement (Spring 1970).

A special issue published in 1980, “Black Pastors/White Professors: An Experiment in Dialogic Education,” attempted to bridge the perceived gap between the life of black congregations and the dominant modes and content of education in theological schools.<sup>16</sup> In 1983 “Unity, Pluralism, and the Underrepresented” addressed the concerns of broader racial/ethnic communities,<sup>17</sup> and issues in 2002 and 2009 have focused on “The Promise and Challenge of Racial and Ethnic Diversity in Theological Education”<sup>18</sup> and “Race and Ethnicity.”<sup>19</sup> In each case, the articles reflect the ongoing challenges as well as the opportunities presented to Association member schools by the growing diversity of faculty, students, staff, and constituencies.

In the mid-1990s, the Association significantly expanded its work of leadership education for administrators in theological schools. Three issues in 1995–1996 addressed the work of the chief executive officer with volumes devoted to leaders in Roman Catholic and Protestant schools as well as an issue with reflections on their work by a number of chief executive officers. An issue in 1996 reported the results of a major study of the academic deanship in theological schools.<sup>20</sup> The Association’s work with these administrators and those with other specializations within theological schools, such as chief financial officers, development officers, student services personnel, and technology experts, has remained a crucial aspect of the Association’s work to improve and enhance the quality of theological education in North America.

Technology and theological education emerged as a frequently addressed topic at the turn of the millennium with an issue devoted to “Educational Technology and Distance Education: Issues and Implications for Theological Education” in 1999 and issues devoted to emerging technologies and educational practices in 2005 and 2007. At the time of this writing, nearly half of the 273 member schools in the Association have received approval from the Board of Commissioners for “comprehensive

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16. *Theological Education* 16, no. 1, special issue (Winter 1980).

17. *Theological Education* 20, no. 1 (Autumn 1983).

18. *Theological Education* 38, no. 2 (2002).

19. *Theological Education* 45, no.1 (2009).

20. The full results of the study were published in 1999 as *Leading from the Center: The Emerging Role of the Chief Academic Officer in Theological Schools*, by Jeanne P. McLean (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999).

distance education programs,” and more are exploring the possibilities and challenges of such programs, including degrees offered fully online.<sup>21</sup>

The Association’s 1986 Biennial Meeting declared the 1990s to be “the decade of globalization,” embarking on a major project on globalization that stretched from 1986 through the Biennial Meeting in 2000. The project and its various reports,

published in 1986, 1990, 1991, 1993 (three issues), and 1999, reflected the growing consciousness of the interconnectedness of the peoples of the world but also important differences within the Association’s membership. As early as 1980, the Association had appointed the Committee on International Theological Education, but while there

“At the time of this writing, nearly half of the 273 member schools in the Association have received approval from the Board of Commissioners for “comprehensive distance education programs,” and more are exploring the possibilities and challenges of such programs, including degrees offered fully online.

was agreement on the general effort, terminology created disagreements. Some believed that the term *international* rang too much of the nation-state system. The alternative *ecumenical* struck some as too tied to the liberal side of tensions between conservative and progressive Christians. The adoption of *globalization* would characterize the project through its duration, but many found it unsatisfactory given its economic and political implications as used in other contexts.

Another result of the project was to illustrate clearly some of the basic differences between schools representing the three broad ecclesial families within the Association: evangelical Protestant, mainline Protestant, and Roman Catholic/Orthodox. For example, in 1986 the issue titled “Globalizing Theological Education in North America,” included case

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21. The 2012 revision of the Standards of Accreditation allowed fully online academic MA degrees, and in 2013, the Board of Commissioners approved petitions by a few schools requesting exception to the accrediting standards’ residency requirement for professional ministry degrees including MA degrees and the Master of Divinity.



descriptions from 13 schools representing the three ecclesial families. Each family understood and approached globalization from within its particular ecclesial context. There were at least four very different meanings of the term within member schools, which Daniel Aleshire insisted were “not different shades of meaning of a broad construct—they represent fundamentally different, even opposing meanings.”<sup>22</sup> First, for some, the concept was rooted in the proclamation of the Christian gospel throughout the world. A second meaning focused on the ecumenical and worldwide connections among Christian churches and movements. Third, some emphasized the growing movements of justice and liberation, including critique of oppressive political systems. A fourth smaller group of schools understood globalization necessarily to include a theological re-thinking of world religions.

These emphases cut across the ecclesial families of the membership with families emphasizing one or more of the meanings.<sup>23</sup> By refusing to narrow the definition and retaining its breadth, the Association allowed each school to participate in the project in a way to address its own needs and concerns. As Aleshire put it, “the use of the term ‘globalization’ in ATS over the past fifteen years conveyed something about the importance of an educational virtue and gave the schools the opportunity to define the virtue.”<sup>24</sup>

The project bore fruit in redeveloped Standards of Accreditation adopted in 1996 which require global perspective in a number of areas.

Five issues of the journal have addressed issues related to the work of theological school faculty. In 1976, an issue reported on the Association’s study of academic freedom and tenure, a topic of growing concern four decades later. In 1991, the issue titled “Building Theological Faculties of the Future” reported on a consultation that gathered 120 presidents and deans of theological schools to explore the process of building faculties to serve the future needs of theological schools and their constituents. Articles addressed topics such as the graduate preparation of faculty, the relationship between scholarship and teaching, faculty as mentors, and

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22. Daniel O. Aleshire, “Words and Deeds: An Informal Assessment of Globalization in Theological Schools,” *Theological Education* 35, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 29.

23. Glenn T. Miller, *Piety and Plurality: Theological Education since 1960* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 295.

24. Aleshire, “Words and Deeds,” 29.



“pluralism” within the perspectives and persons of faculty. “Faculty Development, Evaluation, and Advancement” was the issue focus of the spring 1995 issue of *Theological Education*. In 2003, the Association convened more than 100 faculty members from ATS member schools to discuss the current state and future needs of theological scholarship. Facilitated conversations addressed theological scholarship and the academy, theological scholarship and communities of faith, and theological scholarship and theological education. The report of the conversation appeared in *Theological Education* in 2005.<sup>25</sup> An issue in 2010 titled “The Status of Theological Research” gathered presentations from senior scholars given at meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature and from the Lilly Conferences on Theological Research.

## Change and continuity

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Clearly the theological school landscape has transformed since 1964. Head count enrollment is up 350 percent, but with more than 270 schools versus 101 in 1964, the size of the median school head count has dropped from 210 to a bit more than 150 and overall enrollment has declined slowly but steadily for nearly a decade. A student population 50 years ago that was dominated by young white men, the majority of whom were headed for congregational ministry, is now more than 38 percent students of color, 34 percent women, and more than 20 percent persons over the age of 50.<sup>26</sup> These students pursue theological education with different aspirations. Some expect to serve communities of faith, others hope to be chaplains, some want to work in nonprofit organizations, and many seek theological education simply for personal enrichment and growth. Those expecting employment as religious leaders graduate to enter a job market that has been remarkably transformed over the course of the half-century of the journal’s existence.

Much has changed, but many of the tensions and challenges cited in the early issues of *Theological Education* remain with us today. Amidst a shifting landscape of declining enrollments, declining church attendance,

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25. “ATS Luce Consultation on Theological Scholarship, May 2003,” *Theological Education* 40, no. 2 (2005): 93–114.

26. 2013–2014 Annual Data Tables (Pittsburgh: The Association of Theological Schools, 2014), tables 2.12-A and 2.14-A.

financial stress, calls for theological preparation to be more immediately relevant for a variety of ministries, and demands for new delivery systems and ways of assessing effectiveness, today's theological educators still struggle to find balance.

Many of the challenges faced by theological schools are similar to those faced 50 years ago: slim financial margins, developing and delivering cur-

“*Perhaps the most significant differences between then and now orbit around two dramatic changes: complexity and diversity.*

ricula appropriate to the needs of communities of faith and the broader public sphere, and issues of faculty training and development. Perhaps the most significant differences between then and now orbit around two dramatic changes: complexity and diversity. Without question, the theological schools of today are much more complex operations than most of them were 50 years ago. The

journal reflects this growing complexity in its articles about the training of administrators for increasingly demanding and specialized roles, and the developments in the processes and expectations of accreditation.

Similarly, within the schools and among them are greater diversities than could have been imagined in 1964. The demographics of students, such as race and ethnicity, gender, age, and prior educational background, just to name a few of the more obvious categories, both enrich and challenge theological schools of 2014 in ways unimaginable in 1964. Rapidly evolving educational technologies and broader information technologies are revolutionizing the ways the educational process takes place. The discussions of educational models in the 1960s and 1970s generally assumed consistent structures, locations, and academic calendars, for example, that no longer can be taken for granted. Much more sweeping and dramatic changes in educational models and practices have taken place in recent years, and signs point to even greater changes in the future. Not only is the assumed “gold standard” of the Master of Divinity degree being challenged by alternative and additional “gold standards,” but paths to degrees and measurements of their effectiveness also confront accreditors with multiple models to assess. And scholarly practice itself is broadening to include an ever wider range of research resources and means of dissemination.

Yet theological schools continue to address these challenges with determination and hope. The challenges are real, and in some cases unprecedented, but theological schools serve and are served by people of hope, whose religious faith recalls numerous examples of provision in the midst of scarcity and deliverance in times of apparent hopelessness. Signs point to coming changes, some of them dramatic, affecting most ATS member schools. Some will be difficult, all will require discernment, but as the past 50 years have demonstrated, new ways can be fruitful and can enable better ways of serving the One for whom, ultimately, theological schools exist.

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#### A WORD OF THANKS

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**1964**

**American Association of Theological Schools**

101 member schools



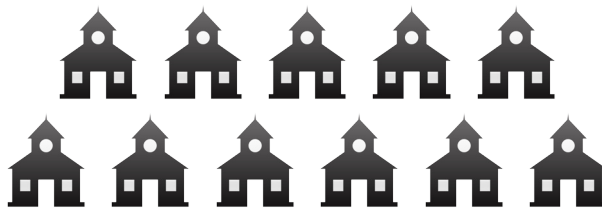
21,000 students



**2014**

**The Association of Theological Schools**

273 member schools



73,000 students



# Fifty Years of Accrediting Theological Schools

*Daniel O. Aleshire*

*The Association of Theological Schools*

*ABSTRACT: Throughout the journal's 50-year history, the one consistent activity of the Association has been accreditation. As a peer-oriented activity, accreditation focuses both on institutional capacity issues and on educational issues. This article assesses changes in the fundamental perspective or basic question that accreditation asks and then examines some of the changes in the Standards that reflect changing practices in theological education.*

As this issue looks back across five decades of the publication of *Theological Education*, the only consistent activity of the Association for all of those years has been accreditation. ATS did not begin as an accrediting agency; it began as a conference of schools in 1918 to engage issues related to theological education. The conference decided to remake itself as an accrediting agency almost two decades later when it adopted the first set of accrediting standards in 1936 and published the first list of accredited member schools in 1938. While some of the regional accrediting agencies in the United States began at the end of the nineteenth century, accrediting as a widespread practice for quality assurance and improvement in higher education is a twentieth-century invention. The ATS history follows a more general history of higher education accreditation, particularly accreditation for schools educating students for the professions. Other activities of the Association have come and gone across these many years, but accrediting has been a consistent and prominent part of the Association's work the entire 50 years that this journal has been published, which includes the majority of the eight decades of ATS accreditation.

During the past century, some essential elements of accrediting practice remained quite stable across accrediting agencies. It began and continues as a peer-oriented activity of institutions. For the ATS Commission on Accrediting, member schools adopt the Standards of Accreditation and the procedures by which the Standards are implemented; the evaluation committees that visit the schools primarily comprise representatives from other

“Through these years, accreditation has had two goals: first, to assure a minimum quality of educational and institutional capacity, and second, to promote improvement in both these areas.

schools who have training in ATS accrediting practices but whose primary expertise is that they work in theological schools and understand them intimately; the Board of Commissioners, the body charged with making all accrediting decisions, is elected by member schools and comprises primarily persons from member schools. Through these years, accreditation has had two goals: first, to assure a minimum quality of educational and institutional capacity, and second, to promote improvement in both these areas.

The ATS Commission on Accrediting is an institutional accreditor of special-purpose institutions. Its Standards have focused both on institutional capacity issues and on educational issues. Standards are divided between those addressing institutional issues and those addressing degree programs offered by member schools. The Commission *accredits* schools and *approves* the degree programs that accredited schools offer. It has maintained a focus on degree programs and their nomenclature in order to ensure a common educational framework for students in accredited schools and to provide a public definition of the educational content of these degrees. Throughout this 50-year period, the MDiv has been the degree in which the largest number of students has been enrolled, although that number has represented a decreasing percentage of the total enrollment.

Many changes have occurred in the context of these consistent features, and this article (1) assesses changes in the fundamental perspective or basic question that accreditation asks, and then (2) examines some of the changes in Standards that reflect changing practices in theological education over these 50 years.

## Changes in the fundamental perspective of accreditation

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During almost a century of work, three, and perhaps four, changes have occurred in the fundamental perspectives or questions that accreditation asks of accredited schools, with a resulting change in what accreditation means as a statement about the schools. For ATS member schools, all of these changes have occurred in the last 50 years.

### Resource-based accreditation

Accreditation for the ATS Commission, as well as in other areas of higher education, began with questions about educational and institutional resources. The initial ATS Commission accrediting standard asked if library holdings were adequate for study at the graduate level of instruction, if faculty had the right qualifications for teaching at the graduate level, and if the school had adequate administrative procedures to undergird the work of the school. “Adequate” was sometimes determined by an actual number and sometimes determined by comparison to a school operating at the baccalaureate or secondary level, in which case the higher the level of education, the more library books or faculty credentials were considered necessary to be adequate. Basing accrediting on the adequacy of resources kept accrediting relatively uniform across schools—some easily met the quantitative requirements, others just barely—but to be “accredited” meant that the school met at least the minimum resource requirements.

“[In the earliest set of standards,] “accredited” meant that a school was judged to possess at least the minimum resources needed for education at the graduate, professional level.

The Standards of Accreditation in effect in 1964, the first year that *Theological Education* was published, stated that an accredited school should have “at least six full-time professors.” The Standards also noted that a “weekly teaching load of more than twelve hours per instructor shall be considered



“[The second approach to accrediting] diversified what “accredited” meant. One school, with a mission that provided for offering only a few masters’ degrees in one location might be accredited on the basis of resources much differently from a school whose mission involved offering many masters’ degrees, perhaps in several locations, and, in addition, offering professional and research doctorates.

as endangering educational efficiency.”<sup>1</sup> While other Standards do not cite a specific number, the Standards reflect a uniform expectation of all schools with regard to resources. Given these questions in the Standards, “accredited” meant that a school was judged to possess at least the minimum resources needed for education at the graduate, professional level.

### **Mission-based accreditation**

As higher education diversified, a second accrediting approach emerged. This approach continued to ask the resource question but asked it in the context of the purpose or mission of the school. Both a baccalaureate-focused college and a research-focused university need a library, for example, but they need very different kinds of libraries, and the difference is not so much in terms of one having more volumes than the other but rather one having a different kind of holdings than the other.

This second approach came later to ATS Commission accreditation than it did to US regional accreditation because ATS member schools maintained more homogeneity than did higher education in general. During the 1970s, however, new member institutions, especially Roman Catholic schools that joined the Association following Vatican II and newly formed evangelical Protestant schools, brought concepts about theological education that differed from those of the dominant mainline Protestant schools. The Standards needed to accommodate this more diverse group of schools. Schools were also becoming more diverse in their educational

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1. *Bulletin 26*, part 1, The American Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (1964), 26.

programming, even within the same ecclesial family. By the 1980s, the Standards reflected changes embodying this second approach to accrediting. The 1984 Standards, for example, state that “The mission statement shall be the basis for identification of the goals which guide the institution in making decisions regarding programs, allocation of resources, constituencies served, relationships to ecclesiastical bodies, and other comparable matters.” The Standard goes on to identify how the mission statement would influence accrediting evaluation: “An institution’s integrity is evaluated in terms of both the adequacy of the mission statement and its specific endeavors to fulfill this mission.”<sup>2</sup>

This change in accrediting practice diversified what “accredited” meant. One school, with a mission that provided for offering only a few masters’ degrees in one location, might be accredited on the basis of resources that differed from a school whose mission involved offering many masters’ degrees, perhaps in several locations, and, in addition, offering professional and research doctorates. Accreditation thus no longer meant the same thing for each school, as it had when the primary question about resources was dominant.

## Evaluation-based accreditation

The third movement emerged in the last two decades of last century, and it added a third question without eliminating the first two. The third question focused on institutional evaluation and assessment of learning outcomes. The early form of this question focused on the general evaluation of the processes and people of the institution. The accrediting question thus became, Does the school have resources necessary to carry out the programs it undertakes to fulfill its mission, and are those programs and the people who implement them evaluated to ensure quality? In the 1980s, an issue of *Theological Education*<sup>3</sup> was devoted to evaluation, and the Commission Standards reflected the broader expectation on evaluation. The 1984 Standards called for evaluation in three ways:

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2. *Bulletin* 36, part 3, The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (1984), 17.

3. Evaluation in Theological Education, *Theological Education* 22, no. 1 (Autumn 1985).

1. An institution shall provide for regular and ongoing evaluation of students, faculty, administration, and governing board in reference to the institution's goals and objectives.
2. Evaluation of the curriculum and of educational methodology shall be provided by students, faculty, and administrative officers.
3. The institution should seek to develop a flexible style in which changes in program flow naturally from the data produced by evaluative procedures.<sup>4</sup>

By the end of the twentieth century, this general expectation of evaluation became more focused on learning outcomes. The earlier introduction of a focus on mission led to the need to articulate particular educational goals but did not require that a school demonstrate that the goals were being attained. The culmination of this third movement in accreditation required schools to demonstrate how they were achieving their educational goals. The ATS Commission undertook a major rethinking of the Standards of Accreditation in 1992–1996 as the Quality and Accreditation project. It was in the context of this effort that the full impact of this third movement in accreditation became evident.<sup>5</sup> The 1996 Standards greatly expanded expectations about both the general task of evaluation and the more particular task of assessing the outcomes of learning. They provided a general model of evaluation that had previously been undefined:

Evaluation is a process that includes (1) the identification of desired goals or outcomes for an educational program, or institutional service, or personnel performance; (2) a system of gathering quantitative or qualitative information related to the desired goals; (3) the assessment of the performance of the program, service, or person based on

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4. *Bulletin* 36, part 3, 25.

5. The Quality and Accreditation project was introduced to the Association in the context of essays about issues in theological education that would contribute to an understanding of the "good theological school." These essays were published in *Theological Education* 30, no. 2 (Spring 1994). The proposed Standards, along with an essay describing the entire redevelopment process, were published as *Theological Education* 32, no. 2 (Spring 1996).

this information; and (4) the establishment of revised goals or activities based on the assessment.<sup>6</sup>

The 1996 Standards went on to identify the importance of assessing the outcomes of learning for each degree program. Each Degree Program Standard included a variation on this language for the MDiv degree: “The institution offering the MDiv shall be able to demonstrate the extent to which students have met the various goals of the degree program.” The *Degree Program Standards* also required that institutions “maintain ongoing evaluation to determine the extent to which the degree program is meeting the needs of students and religious communities, and the institution’s overall goals for the program.”<sup>7</sup>

“The culmination of this third movement in accreditation required schools to demonstrate how they were achieving their educational goals.”

This third perspective in higher education accreditation emerged differently from the original perspective on resources or the second perspective on mission. Both of those perspectives were derived internally from institutions of higher education. The third one came more from outside higher education than from inside it. This was especially the case for theological education. The last decades of the twentieth century saw an increasing public expectation that education demonstrate that it was accomplishing something, not just promoting worthy goals. Education of all forms was becoming more expensive and thereby invited questions about the value proposition that it brought to society. The assessment movement began in elementary education, where learning goals are quite clear and can be assessed in a similar way across a wide population (all fourth graders, for example), moved into secondary education, and finally found its way into higher education. Because it was externally motivated, it did not have the kind of support from faculty or administrators that the first two perspectives had, and in theological schools, few faculty or administrators

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6. *Bulletin 42*, part 3, The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (1996), 34–35.

7. *Ibid.*, 79.

had the technical expertise needed for schools to implement the complex and subtle tasks of assessing the outcomes of learning in graduate, pro-

“What could be considered a fourth perspective on higher education accreditation . . . the federal government began using its recognition of accrediting agencies as a means to implement federal policy regarding higher education.

fessional theological education. In response to this deficit, the Association sponsored a project with some schools that were among the first to undergo a comprehensive accrediting evaluation using the 1996 Standards. Each of these schools prepared a report of what it had learned about assessment and the use of the 1996 Standards; the reports were published in an issue of *Theological Education*.<sup>8</sup>

Following the work of the Pilot School Project, the Association undertook a broader effort to address issues of assessment in the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation

project. This project sought to examine some of the major difficulties of assessment in theological education, such as assessing spiritual and moral maturity, personal integrity, and capacity in pastoral arts and practice. The project involved a range of smaller studies, and the comprehensive work was published in three volumes of *Theological Education*.<sup>9</sup> The Pilot School Project and the Character and Assessment of Religious Vocation project provided significant background reflection and tools to help schools begin to work on an area of accreditation that they had not invented and at which they were less skilled than in other areas.

The focus on learning outcomes was emphasized even more in changes to the Standards of Accreditation in 2012. The *Educational Standard*

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8. Models of Assessing Institutional and Educational Effectiveness: The Pilot School Project, *Theological Education* 35, no. 1 (Autumn 1998).

9. The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation, *Theological Education* 39, no. 1 (2003); Listening to Theological Students and Scholars: Implications for the Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation, *Theological Education* 40, no. 2 (2005); Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation, *Theological Education* 41, no. 2 (2006).

has multiple pages of requirements regarding assessment of learning outcomes.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the first part of each Degree Program Standard requires schools to attend to learning outcomes in the following way: “The primary goals of the program shall be further delineated as demonstrable learning outcomes congruent with the institution’s mission and purpose. Institutions shall demonstrate that students have achieved the goals or learning outcomes of the degree program by means of direct and indirect evidence of student learning.”<sup>11</sup>

## Regulatory accreditation

What could be considered a fourth perspective on higher education accreditation has grown across the past two decades through a changed focus in the use of accreditation by the US federal government. The federal government became financially engaged in higher education in a major way following the passage of the GI Bill (The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944), which committed significant amounts of federal money to provide educational assistance to the millions of World War II veterans. The federal government began using accreditation of higher education institutions to determine their eligibility to receive funds for veterans in the Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952.<sup>12</sup>

ATS was recognized as such an agency in the 1950s. Federal money for higher education increased dramatically with the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965, which provided for a range of federal grants and loans to qualified students attending institutions accredited by agencies recognized by the federal government. These laws created both a vested interest by the federal government because of the significant amount of federal dollars consumed by these programs and their successors and also a vehicle for recognizing accrediting agencies whose accreditation would provide part of the eligibility needed by institutions to receive these federal dollars.

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10. *Bulletin* 50, part 1, The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (2012), G-34–G-36.

11. *Ibid.*, G-39.

12. <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-66/pdf/STATUTE-66-Pg663.pdf>. The act required the Commissioner of the program to publish a list of “recognized accrediting agencies and associations which he determines to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered by an educational institution.” (See section 253, starting on page 675.)

In the early 1990s, however, the federal government began using its recognition of accrediting agencies as a means to implement federal policy regarding higher education. The criteria by which agencies are judged for recognition by the US Secretary of Education have been modified in subsequent renewals of the Higher Education Act but even more significantly in the regulations implementing that legislation. Accrediting agencies have historically not “regulated” accredited institutions—the accrediting process was always too peer-oriented for a regulatory approach. Regulations, however, are the normal pattern of work for a government agency. As the federal government’s social policy has increasingly looked to higher education to achieve one policy goal or another, and as federal funds for student loans have greatly expanded, the government has increasingly forced accrediting agencies to function in more regulatory ways in order to maintain their recognition by the federal government. Sometimes the regulatory expectations are part of standards, but more often they require agencies to follow specified procedures. For example, ATS Commission procedures for addressing complaints against member schools prohibited the Commission on Accrediting from pursuing a complaint if the complainant had instigated a civil suit against the school. The US Department of Education made the Commission change to its current procedure where the complaint is pursued whether or not the individual is in civil litigation with the school. ATS had its reasons for the initial policy (the complainant has a choice about which venue to pursue the complaint, and ATS cannot adequately pursue the complaint if it is in litigation because participants cannot be forthcoming), but as a regulated agency, ATS had to adopt the revised procedure.

Not all policies or procedures regulated by a government agency are negative—they generally serve what is a public good, including protection of students and protection of funds. However, they convert a process that was invented as peer-oriented quality assurance and improvement into a quasi-governmental process in which regulatory expectations are implemented with institutions to which the government has no direct access. It is unclear if this perspective is sufficiently robust to be considered the fourth of these major perspectives in accreditation. What is clear is that the ability of member schools as responsible, knowledgeable actors through an accrediting association has been curtailed—if member schools want



that accreditation to provide access to federally guaranteed student loan resources.<sup>13</sup>

## Changing practices in theological education

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Three of the four fundamental changes in the questions that accreditation has asked of accredited schools could have occurred had the educational practices remained the same. Over these 50 years, however, many changes in the practices of theological education have occurred, and I will comment on only three: (1) changing patterns of delivery, (2) focus on new constituencies, and (3) issues related to governance and administration. Each of these three illustrates the interaction of changes in practices in the schools, ATS programmatic initiatives, and the accreditation process.

### Changing patterns of educational delivery

The root practices of theological education in North America have followed a normative pattern: students go to a campus where they attend classes, live in residential facilities, share common meals, and enjoy the educational resources of faculty, library, and fellow students. This was not simply the normative pattern of education in ATS member schools 50 years ago—it was virtually the only pattern. The Standards of Accreditation made no mention of alternative patterns of delivering theological education in 1964. The Standards in force in 1974 introduced one variation to campus-based education with the publication of criteria for clusters.<sup>14</sup> The background issues related to clusters or consortia of theological schools were explored in two early issues of *Theological Education*.<sup>15</sup> The effort

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13. This issue has been described primarily in terms of US laws and involvement in higher education. The ATS Commission on Accrediting accredits theological schools in the United States and Canada, and Canadian schools rightly protest the US government's intrusion. However, the US loan programs benefit US citizens, and if schools in other countries want to participate in the US federal loan program for the benefit of US citizens that they enroll, they can apply for participation. There are several Canadian schools accredited by the ATS Commission on Accrediting that do participate in this US federal program.

14. *Bulletin* 31, part 3, The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (1974), 40–44.

15. Theological Education in the 1970s: Redeployment of Resources, *Theological Education* 4, no. 4 (Summer 1968); and Cooperative Structures for Theological Education, *Theological Education* 4, no. 4, Supplement 1 (Summer 1968).

had both educational and resource dimensions. The educational goal was for students to have broader exposure to courses and ideas than could be provided by a single denominationally related seminary. The resource goal was to increase resources available for theological education without commensurate greater expense to schools by sharing resources, such as library holdings, that together would be significantly greater than any one school could afford. These changes were not only permitted by the Standards of Accreditation, but they were also advocated by the Association. The formation of clusters of schools provided patterns for students of one seminary to take courses at another by going to another campus. It was still campus-based education, but it was on another campus.

By 1984, the Standards of Accreditation included a Standard on off-campus education that referenced a much longer document in the Standards, "Criteria for Extension/Satellite Credit Offerings and Degree Programs."<sup>16</sup> The introduction to that document notes that the goal of the guidelines regarding off-campus education is to "assure all of the publics who use accredited status as a measure of educational quality that off-campus credit activities are qualitatively equivalent to on-campus study . . ."<sup>17</sup> The statement then goes to considerable length to identify the resources and processes that would allow off-campus courses to be considered "qualitatively equivalent"—the key educational principle being equivalency. Off-campus theological education appears to have begun with the suspicion that it was inferior to on-campus education, and thus its equivalency to on-campus education was necessary. Nothing in the statement suggests that characteristics present in the off-campus setting but absent in the on-campus setting (such as unique ministry contexts) might be valuable resources for educational quality in off-campus education. For the first time, however, the Standards had accommodated a pattern of theological education that was not based in a campus setting. The 1994 Standards reflect a shift in the "equivalency" language. The introduction to the "Criteria for Extension and Distance Learning Programs" states that "the goal of these standards is to assure all of the publics who use accredited status as a measure of educational quality that all units of an educational institution

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16. *Bulletin* 36, part 3, 59–63.

17. *Ibid.*, 59.

fulfill their stated purposes . . . .”<sup>18</sup> The equivalency language was replaced with language about fulfilling stated purposes, constituting a major shift in the way accreditation looked at extension-based theological education. The Standards attend to educational rigor in a variety of ways, but the understanding of good extension-based education ceased to be that it could demonstrate its equivalence to on-campus education.

The comprehensive redevelopment of the Standards in the Quality and Accreditation project (1992–1996) led to the adoption of a Standard that clarified several issues and began to address distance education as a form of education where the faculty member and student do not necessarily meet in face-to-face settings. While the door clearly opened for distance learning, the 1996 Standard limited the amount of credits taken as “external independent study” to no more than one-third of the credits required for any ATS-approved degree because of the formational character of theological degrees. The amount of course work that could be completed in a distance education format was expanded by changes to the Standards adopted in 2000, and by 2012, the Standards permitted schools approved for a comprehensive distance education program to offer the full academic MA by distance education, to offer as much as two-thirds of the MDiv and professional MAs by distance education, and by special permission of the Board of Commissioners, to offer the full MDiv and professional MA in distance-learning format. The *Educational Standard* identifies four patterns of creditable theological education: campus-based, extension- or branch-campus-based, distance-learning-based, and independent-study-based, and describes quality expectations for each.<sup>19</sup>

“Issues of race/ethnicity and women in theological education continue to be significant elements of ATS programming and the Commission on Accrediting’s Standards, with a focus that has shifted from inclusion to a broader range of issues, most especially leadership.

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18. *Bulletin* 41, part 3, The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (1994), 71.

19. *Bulletin* 50, part 1, G-30–G-34.

The educational practices of theological schools have shifted over the past 50 years. Standards of Accreditation have both enabled new practices and increased the quality expectations for those practices. The new practices did not replace existing ones; they added new options. Almost all ATS schools have campus-based programs; many of them have only campus-based programs; others have campus-based programs and an array of extension- or distance-learning programs; and still others are developing hybrid approaches that mingle different patterns of delivery in a single for-credit course. The story of changes in educational delivery reflect the story in many other areas of institutional life—from one of relative homogeneity to one of considerable diversity.

### **New constituencies**

When *Theological Education* began publication 50 years ago, the students, faculty, and administrators at member schools were almost all white males. African American students and faculty were certainly present in historically black theological schools, but not in many other schools. The percentage of racial/ethnic students in ATS member schools has grown from an estimated 5 percent in the late 1960s (including the historically black schools) to nearly 30 percent in fall 2013. The percentage of Hispanic students in member schools has grown by 30 percent during the last decade.<sup>20</sup> The balance between racial/ethnic-focused institutions is also shifting. ATS now has more schools that serve primarily Asian constituencies than it has historically black theological schools. Women began attending seminary in significantly growing numbers in the 1970s and now constitute the majority of student enrollment in 25 percent of ATS member schools and more than 30 percent of total enrollment across all schools.

The Standards of Accreditation mentioned nothing about race and ethnicity in 1964, nor did they in 1974. ATS, however, began giving attention to race and ethnicity in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and two issues of *Theological Education* were published in 1970 that addressed issues of

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20. Enrollment numbers are drawn from the ATS Annual Data Tables and early dates from *Fact Book on Theological Education*, <http://www.ats.edu/resources/institutional-data/annual-data-tables>.

black religious experience and black theological education.<sup>21</sup> By the early 1980s, the Standards of Accreditation included references to the importance of including women and racial/ethnic constituents, attending to their particular educational and community needs, and using affirmative action strategies as appropriate, and they included a Standard named “Responsiveness to Minority and Women’s Concerns.”<sup>22</sup>

What happened to precipitate this shift in accrediting attention to women and racial/ethnic constituents? It likely was not that one of these actions led to another in some linear fashion. Rather, it was that enrollments of racial/ethnic students were increasing, that ATS turned programmatic attention to issues related to racial/ethnic theological education, and that the Standards of Accreditation underwent changes resulting in a normative direction toward greater inclusion. If there was any linearity, it was that the Standards of Accreditation came last—because they tend to be retrospective rather than prospective.

Issues of race/ethnicity and women in theological education continue to be significant elements of ATS programming and the Commission on Accrediting’s standards, with a focus that has shifted from inclusion to a broader range of issues, most especially leadership. The current Standards of Accreditation state that

In their institutional and educational practices, theological schools shall promote awareness of the diversity of race, ethnicity, and culture widely present in North America and shall seek to enhance participation and leadership of persons of color in theological education. Schools shall assist all students in gaining the particular knowledge, appreciation, and openness needed to live and practice ministry effectively in culturally and racially diverse settings.<sup>23</sup>

The current Standards go on to state, with regard to women,

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21. The Black Religious Experience and Theological Education, *Theological Education* 6, no. 3 (Spring 1970); and The Black Religious Experience and Theological Education for the Seventies, *Theological Education* 6, no. 3, Supplement (Spring 1970).

22. See, for example, *Bulletin* 36 (1984), 19 and 25.

23. *Bulletin* 50, part 1, General Institutional Standard 2, section 2.5, G-4.

In their institutional and educational practices, theological schools shall promote the participation and leadership of women in theological education within the framework of each school's stated purposes and theological commitments. Schools shall assist all students in gaining the particular knowledge, appreciation, and openness needed to live and practice ministry effectively in diverse settings.<sup>24</sup>

## **Authority and governance**

ATS accreditation has given increasing attention to governance and administration as these functions have grown in importance and centrality among ATS member institutions. The Standards as late as 1974 followed an earlier model of limited attention to governance and administration: "There shall be a governing board which is responsible for maintaining the vitality and integrity of the institution." The Standards identified several typical tasks for the board; normally it "chooses the administrative officers, confers degrees, enters into contracts, approves budgets, and holds title to property" and "is responsible for the establishment, maintenance, exercise, and protection of the institution's integrity and its freedom from unwarranted harassment or inappropriate external and internal pressures and destructive interference or restraints."<sup>25</sup> The Standard on governance reflects a time when institutional mission was not yet part of the Standards, when nonprofit and personnel law made fewer demands on schools, and when institutions themselves were less complex. The Standard conveyed a perspective that the board had certain corporate functions to fulfill and an important role in protecting the institution. There was no mention of shared governance. These functions still exist for boards but not in the bare-bones way they were articulated in earlier versions of the standards.

ATS accreditation engaged governance and administration quite differently when the Standards were comprehensively redeveloped in the 1990s. What had been little more than a requirement that a school have a board and that the board attend to certain corporate responsibilities was replaced with a much more fulsome perception of the nature of authority: "the exercise of rights, responsibilities, and powers accorded to a theological school by its charter, articles of incorporation and bylaws, and ecclesiastical and

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24. *Bulletin* 50, part 1, General Institutional Standard 2, section 2.6, G-4.

25. *Bulletin* 31, part 3, 11–12.

civil authorizations applicable to it or the overall educational institution of which it is a part.” And governance was now described as this: “While final authority for an institution is vested in the governing board and defined by the institution’s official documents, each school shall articulate a structure and process of governance that appropriately reflects the collegial nature of theological education.” The current Standard does not so much describe a particular governing process as it requires schools to construct a governing process according to certain principles. As ATS schools became more complex and diverse in their institutional structures, governance processes became more important for all schools, and patterns of governance became increasingly different from one school to another. The redeveloped Standards introduced the concept of shared governance for the first time (“Shared governance follows from the collegial nature of theological education. Unique and overlapping roles and responsibilities of the governing board, faculty, administrators, students, and other identified delegated authorities should be defined in a way that allows all partners to exercise their mandated or delegated leadership.”).<sup>26</sup> Similar to other descriptions of governance, the current Standard describes the ingredients of shared governance rather than an explicit pattern of shared governance. The Standard goes on to identify the typical roles of board, administration, and faculty in the governing process. This Standard demonstrates as much change over time as any ATS Commission on Accrediting standard.

Governance issues have often been at the root of some of the most serious conflict and accrediting interactions with member schools. Crises in governance in the 1970s and 1980s, in the context of denominational conflict, framed a backdrop for the serious attention that authority and

“As ATS schools became more complex and diverse in their institutional structures, governance processes became more important for all schools, and patterns of governance became increasingly different from one school to another.

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26. See *Bulletin* 50, part 1, General Institutional Standard 7, section 7.1.1, G-14; sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.2, G-15.



governance were given in the redevelopment of the Standards in 1990s. Failures in governance, whether precipitated by faculty, board, administration, or all of them in some combination, can be more threatening to educational quality and institutional stability than financial crisis or any other kind of institutional failure. The opening phrase of the Standard on governance is true, whether or not it could ever be enforced as an Standards of Accreditation: “Governance is based on a bond of trust among boards, administration, faculty, students, and ecclesial bodies.”<sup>27</sup> When trust is broken, the most that accrediting standards can do is provide guidance in the middle of a hostile environment or assess which party shares what kind of blame in a governance failure.

## Conclusion

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Perhaps the biggest change in accreditation from 1964 to 2014 is the many changes in perception about what accreditation should mean and how it should function in higher education. The governmental effort to use accreditation in a more regulatory manner pushes accreditation in directions that it was not initially invented to go, and puts significant stress on accrediting procedures. The twenty-first-century tendency to deprofessionalize has precipitated suspicion about peer review and any quality assurance effort that is conducted by the institutions whose quality is being monitored. Sweeping changes in religious practices and churchly structures in the past 30 years have raised questions about the form and value of theological education and the way that its quality is defined, and these changes stress accreditation as a process for quality assurance. And, in the context of these changes, ATS accreditation continues to serve an important role, to attend to criticisms, to revise its Standards, and to serve both “the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public” — the currently defined mission of the Commission on Accrediting.<sup>28</sup>

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27. *Bulletin* 50, part 1, Standard 7, G-14.

28. *An Overview of US Accreditation*, Washington DC: CHEA, 2012. Judith Eaton, president of the Council on Higher Education Accreditation notes that “accreditation is a trust-based, standards-based, evidence-based, judgment-based, peer-based process” — a process that has served theological education well.

# Continuing the Conversation



# Finding the Right Niche: A Case Study on the Relationship between Seminary and University

*Joseph P. Chinnici, OFM, Franciscan School of Theology  
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*Using a case study from their own experience, the presidents of the Franciscan School of Theology and the University of San Diego comment on some dimensions of John (Jay) Phelan's article "Seminary and University: Challenges and Opportunities" appearing in Theological Education 48, no. 2 (2014). The authors call particular attention to presuppositions needed to guide a fruitful relationship, the importance of leadership, the lived commitment to personal relationships, and the creative exchange of values between a seminary/theological school and a university.*

## Introduction

At the end of a three-year process on the part of the Franciscan School of Theology (FST), Berkeley, California, and an 18-month process on the part of the University of San Diego (USD), the seminary/theological school, which had been a member institution of the Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, picked up its stakes, moved to Oceanside, California, 49 miles north of San Diego, and affiliated with the Catholic University of San Diego. The affiliation agreement was signed by both parties on May 31, 2013. What follows may be read as a "report from the field" on the two major sections of Jay

Phelan's article detailing "practical advantages for the seminary and university" and "theological and cultural advantages."

## Discovering an institutional niche

Phelan's article, although rightfully and comprehensively calling attention to the wide variety of relationships, privileges to some extent the seminary/theological school that has either inherited a niche within a larger university or has decided to merge with the larger school. The case study before us is slightly different. FST and USD, neither of which had a previous relationship with the other,

decided to frame their relationship as a “robust affiliation.” Understanding the preliminary steps and some of the reasoning that led to this conclusion may serve to illuminate several aspects of Phelan’s overview and be helpful for a wider audience.

### **Mission and sustainability**

The Franciscan School of Theology had experienced declining enrollment and financial constraints that led to the formation of a self-study group in fall 2009. At first confronted with these institutional needs, the group reframed its work in terms of the school’s aspirational desires to train men and women for ministry in the Franciscan tradition and at a location that would best meet this mission and ensure its sustainability for the twenty-first century. On its part, the University of San Diego believed its affiliation with a graduate school of theology would complement its institutional mission. Both institutions were accredited by the same regional association (WASC) and the theological school additionally by the ATS Commission on Accrediting. They shared key commitments and proven accomplishments, albeit at different levels, to academic excellence, globalization, a philosophy and practice of outreach for social

change, and Catholic identity. These affinities surfaced repeatedly in the discussions. In addition, the university’s 8,000-member student body dwarfed the theological school’s of fewer than 50. In such a situation, a tremendous economy of scale was created for the smaller entity, and the larger entity did not receive a burdensome relationship. Thus, the two institutions found themselves in a situation that proved very promising on two different levels: mission and sustainability. The chosen partners were both open to dialogue.

### **Leadership**

In making a strong case for the relationship between a theological school and a university, Phelan’s article remains somewhat on the abstract level. In the case under discussion, and probably for most situations, the role of leadership needs emphasis. Experientially, no affiliation will succeed unless a great deal of institutional influence, authority, commitment, and leadership is exercised at the highest levels. A coherence of mission is key. For FST and USD, the work of the presidents of both institutions was significant in securing the interest and commitment of governance boards and administrative personnel. After initial discussions at the presidential

level, the academic vice presidents, deans, and legal counsels engaged actively in the discussions. This was done to ensure a sustainable buy-in from the participants, one that endured beyond the founding members. The boards of the institutions heard directly from the presidents about the possibilities inherent in the relationship. Eventually, both boards unanimously accepted the affiliation.

Two significant learnings emerged from the experience. Any relationship, whether it be a merger or an affiliation, needs to proceed primarily from the commitment to a complementary mission on the part of both parties; and, once this vision is articulated, both presidents must fully commit to securing the support of the various governance structures. The general acceptance of the relationship on the part of multiple decision-making levels of the institutions is important. Mission enhancement and full administrative commitment are foundational steps necessary to ameliorate the organizational, financial, and administrative differentials that may surface in subsequent explorations. And these two preliminary building blocks must continually guide and support the relationship as it develops and grows.

## **The importance of relationship**

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Phelan's article consistently calls attention to the different levels and arrangements of partnerships. Here the article would be enhanced through some attention to the details involved in a partnership. In the case of FST and USD, initial discussion centered on "merger," with the university subsuming the mission, governance, administration, and assets of FST into a separate graduate entity or perhaps a dimension of an already existing graduate school. In the short run, a merger would possibly achieve the greatest sustainability for the smaller entity and integrate graduate theology into the university's mission. But what would happen in the long run? In such a situation, how would FST maintain the integrity of its academic programs and mission? Would such an arrangement be acceptable within the limits imposed by the Church's canon law? How would faculty be appointed and curriculum be established? Would the smaller entity, over time, receive the attention, marketing, and resources needed to keep its mission intact, particularly given the fact that it would not be a significant income-generating entity? From the side of the university, how

would the relationship complicate or make difficult its preestablished structures for the development of curriculum or the appointment of faculty or the allocation of funds? Would the presence of a theological school compromise the publicly funded bond covenants of the university? What type of complicated corporate structure would need to be developed to maintain the integrity of both entities? Would it be better to create the new corporate structure of a "joint venture," or would this bring too many organizational complications?

All of these issues begged for resolution and directed the discussion toward creating a "robust curricular and service affiliation." In this arrangement, the emphasis is placed on professional and personal relationships. Both schools maintain their own institutional integrity with separate control in all areas. Vertically considered, each institution is free of the other. The one institutional tether established is that between the president of FST and the vice-provost of USD, both of whom are to monitor the relationship's progress. FST and USD established an initial cost for technological integration and then a yearly fee-for-service arrangement, particularly in the areas of registration and institutional technology. Academically the students

may take graduate courses at either entity and transfer them into their program, and the schools commit themselves to work toward equity in this curricular exchange. Horizontally considered in terms of the relationships between people (students, faculty, and administrators), each entity commits to establishing mutually beneficial relationships. This is a much harder, long-term commitment that grows over time and is dependent on personal initiative. Thus, the faculty are challenged to create collegial relationships that may extend to team teaching or joint symposia; each entity provides the riches of its religious services to the other; and the students can take advantage of the library resources, programs, and academic expertise at each school. These are the parameters of a "robust" service and curricular relationship.

Ultimately, what this indicates is the importance of human relationships in the establishment of any particular arrangement. And unless these relationships are actively nurtured at all significant levels of the different communities of learning, the affiliation can easily weaken or become compartmentalized into its legal and vertical dimensions. What the arrangement opens up, however, is the possibility of mutuality, the active



exchange of ideas and projects, the cross-fertilization of experiences, and the communal commitment to the values of a shared mission. Success is the responsibility not just of leadership but also equally of the citizens of this new “commonwealth of learning.” It is this challenge of relationships that Phelan’s article points to that is most important.

### **The challenge of mutual enrichment**

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Toward the end of his article, Phelan engages the thought of Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank. Here he discusses the contribution of a seminary/theological school to the life and culture of the university. The university in the analysis falls short. Citing Hauerwas and Milbank, Phelan notes that the modern university lacks “a coherent intellectual formula or moral vision” (p. 12); riddled with modernist presuppositions related to rationality and objectivity, it needs theology as “the only discipline capable of reclaiming the purpose of the university” (p. 12). As Milbank argues, all disciplines other than theology “are objectively and demonstrably null and void, altogether lacking in truth . . .” (p. 12). Our experience was quite the opposite and our

framework of analysis very different. In fact, the common ground of our shared mission and vision as Roman Catholic institutions provided the foundation upon which our affiliation was construed.

In creating this “robust curricular and service affiliation,” the presidents of FST and USD wished to develop a “new model of theological education” and a creative relationship between fields of endeavor that had historically grown separate. Building on the affinities previously outlined, USD and FST are in the process of discovering that a richer identity is possible if both institutions operate from their core values and commitments. Institutional coherence or “shared” values have emerged particularly in the following areas: (a) the convergence between USD’s strong tradition of philosophy and theology/religious studies requirements for all undergraduates and FST’s theology curriculum; (b) a long history of community service learning with robust participation by USD undergraduates and graduates and FST’s pastoral ministry program; and (c) USD’s ranking #1–3 nationally for study abroad with a service component and FST’s religious vision and practice of globalized theological education. In other words, both FST and USD have

found that their distinct “catholicities” have not been adversarial but rather mutually enriching; in fact, the sacred and the secular have met to deepen a commonly shared Catholic identity. The relationship is clearly worth the effort. We believe that the relationship of our institutions—developed thoughtfully, inclusively, and personally—achieves a new model for

theological education, provides a powerful witness for the academy, and strengthens our collective mission to the world.

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# Open Forum



# Beyond the Evangelical-Ecumenical Divide for Theological Education in the Twenty-First Century: A Pentecostal Assist

*Amos Yong*  
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*ABSTRACT: Theological education is changing dramatically as the world and church catholic are both also being transformed at accelerated rates. Older polarities, such as the evangelical-ecumenical divide, are increasingly irrelevant. Yet amidst the dizzying pluralism of the present time, can the center hold in theological education? The thesis suggested in this essay is that what some call the present “pentecostalization” and “charismatization” of world Christianity may provide glimpses of a way forward for theological educators looking into the middle of the twenty-first century.*

Contemporary theological education is undergoing massive change in response to innumerable pressures from both within and outside. The following identifies some of the influential ecclesial dynamics especially related to the ongoing growth of the Pentecostal-charismatic renewal movement worldwide, clarifies the ferment in theological education in light of these developments, delineates the opportunities and challenges for renewal movements at the interface of theological education, and charts some possible trajectories going forward. The thesis to be suggested is that renewal movements have the potential to revitalize theological education in the twenty-first century, although there are some significant hurdles to such reinvigoration that will need to be addressed.

## The changing global-scape of theological education

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Theological educators are grappling with the fact that the world for which they are preparing their students is changing at a rapid rate. While we can talk about various revolutionary trends—from globalization and economic dynamics, to media and communicative technological

developments, to applied technological advances and the ethical questions these raise—ecclesial transformations also deserve comment. Three new faces or facets of the church catholic are noteworthy.

First, the demographic data clearly suggest that, as has been repeated with mantra-like monotony in more recent times, the center of gravity for the world Christian movement is shifting to from the Euro-American West to the Global South.<sup>1</sup> This has implications for what we can expect

“*Pentecostal- and charismatic-type renewal has played a significant, if not indispensable, role in the revitalization and even persistence of the Roman Catholic Church not only in Latin America but around the world.*

of theological students at a number of levels. For instance, the Western canon, including the Western theological tradition, cannot be taught in precisely the same way when students will have much less of an understanding of such upon which to build. Further, for student learning to be relevant to their Global South contexts, theological educators will have to find new ways to integrate Global South perspectives and resources into an already crowded curriculum. The point is that *what* theological educators do and *how* theological educators go

about their work will need to be reexamined in light of majority world histories, cultures, and realities.<sup>2</sup> We return in a moment to pick up on some of these matters.

Second, however, it is not just that more Christians come from Asia, Africa, and Latin America today than before, but that the most vital and growing segments of Christianity are of a more evangelical and Pentecostal persuasion.<sup>3</sup> At least two things, however, need to be said immediately in

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1. See, for example, Todd Johnson and Kenneth Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

2. Joel A. Carpenter, “The Christian Scholar in an Age of World Christianity,” in *Christianity and the Soul of the University: Faith as a Foundation for Intellectual Community*, eds., Douglas V. Henry and Michael D. Beaty (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 65–84.

3. As documented by Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), among many others.

this regard: that there is less of an evangelical-ecumenical chasm in many areas of the majority world than there is in the United States,<sup>4</sup> and that there are a range of “pentecostalism” that include churches and movements that look, sound, and feel “pentecostal-like” but do not self-identify with that label.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, institutions of theological education that are intended to be primarily servants of the Christian church will need to reassess how to best engage, equip, and empower the work of the next generation of more evangelical- and Pentecostal-type students emerging from these locations.

Last but not least, however, it is not just that there is expansion among evangelical and Pentecostal churches, but that there is also their increasing and palpable influence in more established ecclesial traditions. Some scholars are thus talking about a “Pentecost outside Pentecostalism,” referring to the “pentecostalization” and “charismatization” of the mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic, and even some Orthodox churches.<sup>6</sup> Pentecostal spirituality and worship styles are being adopted; the gifts or charisms of the Spirit are being widely manifest; the person and work of the Holy Spirit is being embraced and privileged. Others have even gone so far as to suggest that Pentecostal- and charismatic-type renewal has played a significant, if not indispensable, role in the revitalization and even persistence of the Roman Catholic Church not only in Latin America but around the world.<sup>7</sup> The point is that world Christianity is increasingly being pentecostalized and charismatized. Herein we find both the challenges and the opportunities for the next generation of theological educators.

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4. All of this of course depends on how one defines both *evangelical* and *ecumenical*. For the record, my own evangelical dispositions lie more with pietist and Wesleyan traditions, both of which contribute to the DNA of modern Pentecostalism, and this will surely be contested by other more Reformed and Calvinist-Baptistic evangelicals who would perhaps also be resistant to the efforts motivating this essay. Whether or not a proposal can or should be proposed along this other evangelical stream will have to be taken up perhaps by someone else at another time.

5. On this, see for instance Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001).

6. For example, Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2002).

7. See, for example, Edward L. Cleary, *How Latin America Saved the Soul of the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 2010), and *The Rise of Charismatic Catholicism in Latin America* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2011).



## The challenge for theological education

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Theological education today is thus at a crossroad. If Greek *paideia* (inspired at Athens) developed the ideal and successful member of the premodern polis, and if scientific and critical thinking has shaped higher education for the modern world,<sup>8</sup> whither goest theological education in an increasingly post-modern, post-Enlightenment, post-Western, and postcolonial twenty-first century? While much can be said about this (and many books have been written), brief comments on the teleological, methodological, and personnel dimensions of this question can be suggestive of potentially helpful ways forward.

Teleologically, of course, this is a challenging issue within a modern paradigm of knowledge that separates facts from values, orientations, and purposes.<sup>9</sup> This is why theological educators have been hamstrung in the last 200 years, seeking a place at the table of academia but having to argue for its right to be present at such without being able to formulate its *raison d'être* on its own (theological) terms. If theological education broadly construed involves nothing less than forming students to live fully into their personal vocations, in Christian terms, this means shaping members of the body of Christ (students) to live fully into the vision of the coming reign of God that Christ inaugurated (Christ's vocation belonging thus to his followers).<sup>10</sup> Christian theological education thus bridges the past (the life and teachings of Christ and the traditions spawned from that) to the future (the coming reign of God) via the present (formational processes). Such a clearly defined course is crucial for disciplining theological-educational creativity and innovativeness—both necessary qualities in a globalizing

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8. As documented by David H. Kelsey, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1993).

9. Another way of putting it is that even theological education has been overly focused on the cognitive transfer of information to the neglect of engaging with the affective transformation of human hearts, lives, and vocations; for further discussion, see the more classically oriented treatment by Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), and a more recent analysis and assessment by James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

10. In a pluralistic world, theological education can also be understood as enabling members of other faith communities (students) to live fully into the ideals of their traditions. Some contexts of theological education will be better equipped than others to foster such multiconfessional learning. I comment further on this important matter later.

world—according to the light of Christ’s life, ministry, and teachings as preserved in the apostolic tradition and anticipated in the shalomic justice of the coming reign of God. If theological educators lack such target and focus, their efforts will meander and even be in vain.

Methodologically, then, agreement on the *telos* of Christian theological education as sketched invites deliberation of how to orient the next generation of Christians (students who are members of the body of Christ) toward the coming reign of God. The public of theological education in this sense is irreducibly triadic: how to best enable the church’s interface with the academy for its witness to society (the world).<sup>11</sup> Theological education thus operates according to this (at least triadic) hermeneutical and methodological “spiral”: from the church in the world through the scriptural, theological, and scholarly (academic, scientific, disciplinary, etc.) traditions back to the church witness to the world, and vice-versa. This is, in important respects, a retrieval of the Athens model of whole-person formation for communal engagement, albeit there is no ignoring the Berlin thrust of critical, scientific inquiry as part of the educational process. The key is that theological education cannot be merely cognitive but is inevitably fully personal.<sup>12</sup> If the goal is the formation of not only knowers but also doers (those working out vocationally the calling of the coming reign of God), then theological education must integrate cognitive with affective, aesthetic, and practical knowing.<sup>13</sup> In this case, the traditional seminary classroom is only one site, perhaps even the least important one, amidst the educational process, while the domains of the church (the faith community) and society (i.e., the marketplace, the polis, the cultural sphere) emerge more centrally in focus. If all theology is contextual, so also should theological education be contextually relevant and engaged, shaping students academically for witness through the church for the sake of the world.

Personnel-wise, then, theological faculties who mediate student learning are no longer merely repositories of head knowledge but are mentors

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11. As by-now classically delineated in David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

12. Not just knowing *about* Christ or the Spirit, but *being in relationship with* Christ, and *being led by* the Spirit, to put it in Pentecostal-charismatic terms.

13. For example, David I. Smith and James K. A. Smith, eds., *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2011).

“Theological faculties who mediate student learning are no longer merely repositories of head knowledge but are mentors and exemplars. . . . This means, however, that faculty members teach not only by lecturing but also by their ways of life and by word and by deed—not only at the front of classroom but also in the halls of academia, in the corridors of society, and in the congregations and communities of churches.

and exemplars. Not every faculty member can do all things equally well, but a theological faculty can as a whole provide a range of models for student emulation. This means, however, that faculty members teach not only by lecturing but also by their ways of life and by word and by deed—not only at the front of classroom but also in the halls of academia, in the corridors of society, and in the congregations and communities of churches. Each will bridge the past (the Christian tradition in its richness) to the future (the coming reign of God) through his or her own discipline’s content and practices, with the latter involving, variously, engagements with the church, the academy, and the world. Student apprenticeships can involve personal relationships with faculty, but in increasingly online environments, these will need to be facilitated variously. In whatever realm, however, theological faculty aim for their telos through a methodological model that integrates heads (academic or discursive knowledge), hearts (personal wholeness or sapiential knowledge), and hands (missional service in church and society or practical knowledge).<sup>14</sup> If students are to live fully into their Christian vocations, they need faculty mentors and exemplars, not just professors (lecturers).

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14. Seminary culture across pietist and related traditions in the nineteenth century was certainly shaped by a commitment to the holistic formation of heads-hearts-hands, but this has suffered as seminaries have been increasingly transformed by incorporation into academia and university environments; for the former, see, for example, Dana L. Robert, “American Women and the Dutch Reformed Missionary Movement, 1874–1904,” in Willem Saayman and Klippies Kritzinger, eds., *Mission in Bold Humility: David Bosch’s Work Reconsidered* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 94–112, esp., 97–103; and for the latter, see, for example, Glenn T. Miller, “Historical Influences on Seminary Cultures,” in *Practical Wisdom on Theological Teaching and Learning*, ed. Malcolm L. Warford (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 103–125.

## Pentecostalism: Opportunities and challenges for theological education

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What might happen when the demographic changes of global Christianity are factored into this crossroad of contemporary theological education?<sup>15</sup> I would like us to think about the prospect of a Pentecostal assist in this process. This is not to ignore the many challenges related to such a possibility, both on the Pentecostal side and on the side of largely non-Pentecostal institutions and traditions of theological education. We will need to confront such hurdles squarely and explore if and how they might be vehicles toward a common future. Three sets of dualities or contrasts invite constructive reflection.

First, Pentecostal fundamentalism has traditionally been set against more progressive, even liberal trajectories in historic theological education. The former includes the sociohistorical setting of the early-twentieth-century, fundamentalist-modernist debates wherein Pentecostals aligned themselves with those who they felt took seriously (rather than explaining away) the biblical witness. Part of the result has been a persistent strain of anti-intellectualism that denigrates formal theological education as occurring in “cemeteries” because they dampen rather than empower Christian passion and witness. Yet such so-called Pentecostal biblicism is now seen to interface with contemporary developments in biblical hermeneutics, especially narrative, literary, and reader-response approaches.<sup>16</sup> Pentecostal hermeneutical instincts are to live into, or out of (depending on one’s metaphorical orientation), the biblical horizon, especially as they intuit how such maps onto their real-life experience. In that sense, there is an experiential dynamic that informs Pentecostal spirituality that opens up dialogical possibilities with Wesleyan, Anglo-Catholic, and modern liberal

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15. Clues to such can be found in two articles I have recently published: “Whence and Whither in Evangelical Higher Education? Dispatches from a Shifting Frontier,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 42, no. 2 (2013): 179–192, and “Evangelical Paideia Overlooking the Pacific Rim: On the Opportunities and Challenges of Globalization for Christian Higher Education,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 42, no. 4 (2013): 393–409.

16. I outline some of these hermeneutical developments in my article, “Reading Scripture and Nature: Pentecostal Hermeneutics and Their Implications for the Contemporary Evangelical Theology and Science Conversation,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 63, no. 1 (March 2011): 1–13; see also, for example, Kenneth Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century: Spirit, Scripture and Community* (New York: T & T Clark, 2004).

traditions for which experience is part and parcel, however qualified, of Christian faith and theological understanding. Theological faculties should be at the forefront of mining such dialogical avenues.

“Pentecostal premodern sensibilities can be brought into constructive dialogue with ancient-future initiatives, comparatively engaged with classical Christian mystical or contemplative traditions, or fruitfully analyzed vis-à-vis renewal movements across the Christian tradition, both East and West.

This suggests that Pentecostal spirituality is perhaps categorically irreducible against the claims of those who might want to accentuate its premodern (i.e., irrational), antimodern (i.e., antiscientific), or postmodern (i.e., subjectivistic) features.<sup>17</sup> To be sure, there is much going by the Pentecostal label to criticize on all of these fronts, and the present proposal to envision a Pentecostal assist cannot ignore these. However, might a hermeneutic of charity observe that all three of these claims combine to indicate a richness within Pentecostal spirituality that, if cultivated appropriately (and who better to do this than theological faculties!), can reinvigorate the Christian churches for their mission to the

world? Thus Pentecostal premodern sensibilities can be brought into constructive dialogue with ancient-future initiatives, comparatively engaged with classical Christian mystical or contemplative traditions, or fruitfully

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17. Those who understand Pentecostalism as a premodern form of religiosity—for example, Harvey G. Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1995)—usually emphasize its supernaturalistic commitments. On the other hand, others who associate Pentecostalism more with postmodernism—for instance, Bradley Truman Noel, *Pentecostal and Postmodern Hermeneutics: Comparisons and Contemporary Impact* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010)—recognize that there are points of connection even as there are divergences. And if Pentecostalism is a quintessentially modern religion because of its individualistic, democratic, and laissez-faire sensibilities, as argued by David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Malden, MA: Basil-Blackwell, 2001), then it might also be considered a sort of highroad around modernism precisely in its premodern and postmodern proclivities. Hence my point about its irreducibility in any of these directions.

analyzed vis-à-vis renewal movements across centuries of the Christian tradition, both East and West. Further, how might Pentecostal rejection of certain aspects of modernity (i.e., modern science) be interrogated amidst its seeming embrace of other aspects of modernity (i.e., telecommunicative and applied technologies), especially those related to Pentecostal growth in liberal democracies entering into the global market economy (a modern construct if there ever was one)? Finally, how might Pentecostal affectivity—including the docility inculcated to be responsive to perceptions related to the spiritual dimensions of the world, the visionary aspirations nurtured that inspire the mission-related agency Pentecostals are well known for, and the courage and creativity engendered to propel innovative praxis and behaviors in the public square<sup>18</sup>—be understood amid the full scope of postmodernist impulses and developments? The point of these lines of thinking is to reassess how Pentecostal spirituality provides multiple points of interface with the past and the present heading into the future not registered via reductionist interpretations. Theological faculties ought to be at the forefront of such analyses and explorations.

The preceding might also be suggestive for how to navigate what in some contexts is an evangelical-ecumenical impasse. Within minimizing the challenges here, perhaps Pentecostal spirituality might broker conversation between evangelical (Christ-centered) pietism and ecumenical (peace and justice) pragmatism, for instance. The former expands from a Jesus-focused piety toward a trinitarian (pneumatic) spirituality, while the latter enlarges missionary and evangelistic practices more holistically to include social and even environmental activism in anticipation of the coming reign of God.<sup>19</sup> Yes, oftentimes, Pentecostal enthusiasm for mission and evangelism leads toward an instrumentalist and utilitarian view of education that emphasizes only its professional and applicational

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18. On each of these claims, see, for example, Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993); Gary B. McGee, *Miracles, Missions and American Pentecostalism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010); Nimi Wariboko, *The Charismatic City and the Public Resurgence of Religion: A Pentecostal Social Ethics of Cosmopolitan Urban Life* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). See also Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong, eds., *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

19. On this last point, see A. J. Swoboda, *Tongues and Trees: Toward a Pentecostal Ecological Theology*, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series* (Blandford Forum, UK: Deo Publishing, 2013).



outcomes. However, theological educators ought to be in a better position than most to help students discern more effective paths forward precisely through retrieval and reappropriation of the past. The point to be emphasized in any case is that, albeit acknowledging the significant challenges posed to contemporary theological education by Pentecostal movements, there are also significant opportunities for constructive engagement that repay the investment of time, effort, and resources in light of the emerging global Christianity.

### **The future of theological education: A Pentecostal assist**

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Having assessed the promise and problems of the Pentecostal intersection with theological education, then, I want to ask more specifically about what any Pentecostal assist in this arena looks like. The following is largely heuristic and exploratory, especially since it is still a bit too early to tell as it has only been about one generation since Pentecostals have begun to engage with formal (i.e., accredited) theological education.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps we can say that part of the way forward will feature the emergence of an Azusa Street contribution to the legacies left by Athens and Berlin.<sup>21</sup> I delineate briefly its epistemological, pedagogical, and contextual implications.

Epistemology has been a long-standing concern—some say fixation—in the modern world. Pentecostal spirituality invites reflection on the theological underpinnings of the multicultural epistemology prevalent across Christian education in global contexts. This is not to say that Pentecostals have been epistemologically self-reflective.<sup>22</sup> It is to say, however, that when thematized, the implicit epistemology at work in Pentecostal spirituality can be potentially helpful for theological education in the twenty-first century.

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20. The starting point here can be understood in terms of both the organization of the Society for Pentecostal Studies and the founding of the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, both in 1972; see also my essay, "Pentecostalism and the Theological Academy," *Theology Today* 64, no. 2 (2007): 244–250.

21. See Cheryl Bridges Johns, "Athens, Berlin, and Azusa: A Pentecostal Reflection on Scholarship and Christian Faith," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 27, no. 1 (2005): 136–147; for more on the Azusa Street Mission and its significance, see Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006).

22. One of the few sustained contributions toward this topic is James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), chap. 3.



Any consideration of this matter should return to the Day of Pentecost narrative at the heart of the Pentecostal imagination. The many tongues of the Pentecost event, whatever the historical reality behind the text, opens up to at least a multilingual and polyglossic hearing (pun intended) of the coming reign of God. A Christian epistemology derived from this Pentecost event (which is not reducible to a modern Pentecostal epistemology, note) will turn, minimally, on the following two axioms: that the many tongues suggest the redemptive contributions of many cultures, practices, and ways of life and knowing, and that the fact that these many tongues are spoken, seen (in terms of the tongues of fire descending or alighting upon the Messianic believers in Acts 2:3), and heard presume multiple perceptual modalities through which theological communication occurs. Such a “Pentecostally” inflected Christian epistemology thus grounds theologically the plurality of human ways of knowing—and by extension, learning and communicating—rather than asserting such epistemological pluralism according to any merely politically correct framework.<sup>23</sup>

“Part of the way forward will feature the emergence of an Azusa Street contribution to the legacies left by Athens and Berlin.

A Pentecostal assist would thus reaffirm the centrality and normativity of the biblical witness but also embrace both the Anglican triad (that includes tradition and reason with Scripture) and the Wesleyan quadrilateral (that adds experience), among other epistemological commitments. Herein lies a way forward that does not compromise *sola scriptura*, understood in its richness, but yet allows for the hermeneutical circle not only to run its course but also to provide a theological—even pneumatological, to be more precise—engine to ensure that the process of inquiry does not terminate prematurely. Potentially, then, such a Pentecostally informed

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23. I develop aspects of this argument in my work on disability and the many ways of knowing through which human bodies interface with the world in my book, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), esp. chap. 4; see also Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

approach can bridge the evangelical and ecumenical impasse as well, especially in theological education.<sup>24</sup> If so, what are its pedagogical implications?

Theological education, like other fields within the Berlin or modern educational paradigm, has long foregrounded the professional lecture at

its core. The emergence of online educational platforms is revolutionizing higher education itself and urging multiple modalities of teaching and learning. If a Pentecostally distinctive epistemology is consistent with recent proposals regarding the triarchic mind and multiple intelligences,<sup>25</sup> what applications are relevant for educational pedagogy?

A number of pedagogical imperatives emerge. For starters, discursive modes of communication ought to be expanded to include other intrapersonal, interpersonal, and interrelational forms. The orality constitutive of Christian spirituality across the

Global South requires that theological educators attend to testimonial and narrative genres, audio-visual material, and musical experience and data, among other theological sources. Recognition of the embodied character of human life will motivate intentional engagement with the affective (i.e., imaginative, kinesthetic, and aesthetic) registers of human feeling

“Integrative theological learning will be measured by how the convergence of heads (theoretical knowledge) and hearts (personal and affective wisdom) unfolds with the works of student hands (behavioral skills, axiological attitudes, and praxis skills and competencies).

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24. I have argued this thesis at length—some might complain, exhaustively—in my *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, and Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002).

25. For example, Robert Sternberg, *The Triarchic Mind: A New Theory of Human Intelligence* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), and Howard E. Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons in Theory and Practice*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2006); see also Yong, “Finding the Holy Spirit at a Christian University: Renewal and the Future of Higher Education in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Tradition,” in *Spirit-Empowered Christianity in the 21st Century: Insights, Analyses, and Future Trends*, ed. Vinson Synan, (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2011), 455–476 and 577–587.

and learning. The point about education is not merely the impartation of information but rather the formation of embodied, intersubjective, and teleologically oriented thinking and doing.<sup>26</sup> In the end, integrative theological learning will be measured by how the convergence of heads (theoretical knowledge) and hearts (personal and affective wisdom) unfolds with the works of student hands (behavioral skills, axiological activities, and practical competencies). Students ought to be able to demonstrate their capacity to contribute to the coming reign of God heralded in the life and ministry of Jesus and to document how their aspirations, hopes, and values have been fundamentally (re)oriented by what they have learned so their hands and feet embody their cognitive gains.<sup>27</sup>

The point is not to eliminate the lecture, but to recognize that it is only one (even if important) form that facilitates teaching and learning. Related to this, book learning is essential, but ought not to be the sole medium of content delivery. A Pentecostal assist would insist that teachers draw from a diversity of theological sources and deploy multiple pedagogical forms to ensure that holistic learning accrues.

Beyond the epistemological and pedagogical, however, is the contextual arena. If the classic seminary model (built on the Berlin paradigm) required student consecration for a period of time within a fairly enclosed community, effective theological education in the twenty-first century cannot afford what amounts now to an isolationist approach. Instead, students who are confronted daily with the challenges of ministry in the real world are primed to engage with the biblical, theological, and academic material in ways mitigated by secluded periods of study. Genuine dialogue is fostered when abstract theory meets with concrete historical

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26. Fundamentally, teaching involves engagement with and activation of different learning and thinking styles. The most effective teachers are those who are able to meet students where they are and connect their stronger modalities of learning with the subject matter at hand. When the latter is less conducive to a student's learning inclinations, supplementary measures will need to be enacted. The point is not only to pass on ideas but also to nurture thinkers, hoppers, and doers. See also Robert Boostrom, *Thinking: The Foundation of Critical and Creative Learning in the Classroom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2005).

27. While liberation theologians are right to be motivated by Marx's castigation—"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways: the point, however, is to change it" (the famous quote from Marx's *The German Ideology*)—theological educators will also insist that the dictates of the coming reign of God will always discipline human (revolutionary) activity, no matter how noble their aspirations.

“The point is not to eliminate the lecture, but to recognize that it is only one (even if important) form that facilitates teaching and learning. Related to this, book learning is essential, but ought not to be the sole medium of content delivery. A Pentecostal assist would insist that teachers draw from a diversity of theological sources and deploy multiple pedagogical forms to ensure that holistic learning accrues.

and existential reality. The most successful teachers today are less talking heads than discussion initiators, exploratory guides, and inquiry architects. Transformational and empowering theological education occurs when learning environments (in traditional and online classrooms) encourage and precipitate interactive discussion and exchange.

A Pentecostal assist would proffer that learning is heightened through the dialogical difference that ensues among students situated across a plurality of contexts. The many tongues across the evangelical-Pentecostal-ecumenical spectrum will introduce cognitive dissonance central to the learning processes that are a prelude to the renewal of the mind. Beyond this intra-Christian sphere, eruption in the theological classroom of the many tongues of the many cultural and religious traditions of the world will require the cultivation of additional virtues—of holiness and hospitality, for instance—that enable navigation of our pluralistic world. Last but not least, the many tongues of the many academic, scholarly, and scientific disciplines will precipitate further challenges but also develop additional critical, methodological, and analytical tools that can be brought to bear for the Christian mission.<sup>28</sup> Theological education thus unfolds contextually from the classroom through the church and into the public sphere (i.e., the polis, the marketplace, the cultural area).

The point is to effectively engage students with their own historical and cultural material using pluralistic methodologies in order to inculcate

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28. See my essay, “Academic Glossolalia? Pentecostal Scholarship, Multi-disciplinarity, and the Science-Religion Conversation,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14, no. 1 (2005): 61–80, as well as my book-length *The Cosmic Breath: Spirit and Nature in the Christianity-Buddhism-Science Trialogue*, *Philosophical Studies in Science and Religion* 4 (Boston: Brill, 2012).

the dispositions and habits of theoretically rigorous, holistic, relational, practical, and lifelong learning. All of the above is already happening in evangelical and especially ecumenical theological education. Yet the preceding argues neither from practical grounds nor even from educational-theoretical perspectives but from out of the specificity of Pentecostal spirituality and theological sensibilities. More precisely, the latter is fundamentally inspired from the Day of Pentecost narrative that belongs to the church catholic. In the end, then, whatever epistemological, pedagogical, or contextual advantages of such an alleged Pentecostal assist belongs to the Christian tradition. Pentecostal perspectives simply magnify especially the pneumatological logic undergirding what is already happening in much of the contemporary theological scene,<sup>29</sup> but such clarification can potentially boost educational efforts and initiatives.

### **Renewing theological education: Beyond the evangelical-ecumenical divide**

The thesis of this paper assumes that there is an evangelical-ecumenical divide, that contemporary theological education ought to desire to move beyond such an impasse, and that theological educators will be motivated and able to contribute to such an end. There will be naysayers on each of these assumptions, even if they are driven by different, even contrasting, rationales. However for those who are at least open to triangulating around these themes, the proposal here is that contemporary Pentecostal scholarship, rooted in the dynamics of global Christianity, may have something to contribute to the discussion. The way forward, however, draws not necessarily from Pentecostally copyrighted resources but from Pentecostal reconfigurations of the wellsprings of the Christian tradition. Just as Pentecostal Christians have always considered one of their charisms to be that of renewal of the church, so also here it is suggested that a Pentecostal approach to Christian higher education will revitalize not just Pentecostal seminaries but the broader theological academy as well.

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29. As developed, for instance, by James E. Loder, *The Transforming Moment*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1989), and *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998).

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful for Sharon Tan, as a fellow Malaysian American theological educator—another sign of the present times of theological education—for the invitation to present this essay at her installation as academic dean, and to her president, Barbara Holmes, herself of African American Pentecostal provenance, for the hospitality shown during my brief visit. I am grateful to Dana Robert, Diane Chandler, James Flynn, and two anonymous *Theological Education* peer reviewers for feedback on an earlier draft of this essay. Responsibility for errors of fact or interpretation remains my own.

# A Few Words of Advice: Linking Ministry, Research on Ministry, and Theological Education

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*ABSTRACT: This paper argues that published literature about the work of Protestant ministers in the twenty-first century stands mostly apart from literature about pastoral excellence. Both of these literatures seek to offer advice to theological schools but, in many cases, simply exhort them to do things that they already do. This paper puts forward specific ways to overcome this impasse to improve the linkages between theological education and the practice of ministry.*

Pastors, when asked how they *actually* spend their time, give an answer quite different than the answer they give when they are asked how they *should* spend their time.<sup>1</sup>

The conventional model by which a “learned clergy” was supposed to be formed has broken down, and the church and academy have developed a mutual suspicion and even hostility rather than the synergy that is critical for shaping the clergy to be people who learn throughout their vocations.<sup>2</sup>

One of the cherished slogans of Reformed Christians is *semper reformanda*, the conviction that the church, no matter how God-pleasing its mission and ministry may be right now, is capable of further reform. Theological schools believe something analogous about the work that they do. They can become better than they are. The purpose of organs of planning and evaluation in seminaries is to discover, based on the results of performance, ways that schools can change to fulfill their missions even

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1. Ronald E. Vallet, *Stewards of the Gospel: Reforming Theological Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 189.

2. L. Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry*, Pulpit & Pew Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 118.



better. A central concern of most ATS member schools is the training of pastoral leaders. So it follows that a central concern of those schools is the relationship between the practice of ministry on the one hand and teaching and formation for ministry on the other. It is also important to acknowledge that church life is changing profoundly in North America.<sup>3</sup> Changes in church life make it more, not less, important that theological educators and church leaders work together for the good of the church's witness.

This paper is the result of wondering about the relationship between what researchers know about pastoral work in the early twenty-first century and the advice that theological educators receive. The premise underlying this paper is that there ought to be clear linkages between the teaching and learning that takes place in theological schools and the everyday work that faithful pastors undertake in congregations and other ministry settings. To that end, this paper summarizes and critiques recent publications that have studied the work of pastors and publications that offer advice to leaders of theological schools about how to train pastoral leaders. According to L. Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, authors of the second epigraph that begins this text, there is a hostile divide between churches and institutions of theological education. This paper explores this purported divide. To spoil the ending—or not bury the lead—a key conclusion of this analysis is that there is a body of empirical research about what ministers do in the twenty-first century, another body of literature about what ministers *should* do, and a third body of literature offering advice to leaders of theological schools. But these literatures live separate lives: a Venn diagram depicting the relationships between these three literatures would show tiny areas of overlap. The lack of linkages is a problem, if one affirms the idea that theological schools should relate what they do with the practice of actual ministry.

The analysis here is limited to Protestant schools. While the author believes that what unites Protestants and Catholics as followers of Jesus Christ is far more important than their differences, when it comes to the relationship between the practice of ministry and theological education, most of the critique below simply does not apply to Catholic seminary education in North America because these schools conform to standards for the training of priests set forth by church leaders in the *Program for*

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3. Philip Clayton and Tripp Fuller, *Transforming Christian Theology: For Church and Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010).

*Priestly Formation*.<sup>4</sup> Before proceeding, a few words are needed about the author's standing relative to the issues discussed here. He is a white, male, bourgeoisie faculty member and administrator of a Presbyterian seminary. He is also a Lutheran pastor who was last engaged in full-time parish ministry in 1989. The opinions expressed in this paper are solely the author's own.

This paper has four sections. The first section reviews these three kinds of twenty-first-century literature about the practice of ministry.<sup>5</sup> Thus, this section examines empirical studies of what pastors do, focusing on ministers serving congregations. The second section looks at the related aspirational literature of excellence. This literature stresses what good pastors ought to do. The third section examines explicit advice given to theological schools, some of which shows links to research, some of which does not. Finally, the fourth section offers a critique of these three bodies of literature and makes suggestions for better linkages through better conceptual tools and intentional research programs.

## Empirical research on ministry

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Since the turn of the century, several empirical studies have examined the work that pastors do. The Pulpit & Pew project, supported by Lilly Endowment Inc., examined the work of clergy in the United States using a combination of surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews. The project collected data from 2001 and 2005.<sup>6</sup> Results of the research

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4. The US edition (2006) of the program is available from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (<http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/priesthood/priestly-formation/upload/ProgramforPriestlyFormation.pdf>, accessed May 2, 2014). The program in place for Canadian Catholic seminaries (2002) is available from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (<https://secure.cccb.ca/pubs/pdf/184-093%20Priestly%20Formation.pdf>, accessed May 2, 2014). The level of detail in the program and its careful implementation in seminaries results in extremely close linkages between what theological faculties do and the everyday expectations of priests serving parishes. To put it another way, Catholic seminaries can easily answer student questions about why they must learn specific skills, study specific doctrines, or cultivate specific spiritual practices. By contrast, Protestant seminaries by and large cannot map their specific MDiv curriculum to the practice of ministry with the same level of detail.

5. I conducted searches in several databases to discover pertinent research, including the ATLA Religion Database.

6. See [www.pulpitandpew.org](http://www.pulpitandpew.org).

were reported in seven books, two focusing on Catholic priests<sup>7</sup> and five presenting the results of research and its implications.<sup>8</sup> The study also produced nine focused research reports.<sup>9</sup> This sophisticated study produced a rich set of data and reflections about pastoral ministry, ranging from information about the differences in size of congregations served by pastors, to reflections on job satisfaction and leadership styles. Because of space limitations, this summary discusses how pastors reported using their time and their levels of satisfaction with some dimensions of their lives and work.

One concern of the study was how pastors use their time (not how they ought to use their time). The research project discovered that the number of hours that mainline Protestant pastors reported working declined from 76 hours in 1934 to 51 hours in 2001. There was a decline in the proportion of time spent in civic and community engagement. The proportion of time spent on administration almost doubled. The proportion of time spent on outreach increased. In all time periods, pastors spent a substantial proportion of time in sermon preparation and worship.<sup>10</sup> Table 1 summarizes the distribution of time usage in 2001, aggregated by denominational tradition.<sup>11</sup>

How pastors used time varied by context. For instance, Catholic priests reported spending the most time in administration, reflecting the larger size of Catholic parishes when compared to Protestant congregations. The median number of hours a week spent preaching and preparing to preach for mainline Protestant, conservative Protestant, and pastors in historic black churches was ten hours; it was six for Catholic priests.<sup>12</sup> As

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7. Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Evolving Visions of the Priesthood: Changes from Vatican II to the Turn of the New Century* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003); Dean R. Hoge, *The First Five Years of the Priesthood: A Study of Newly Ordained Catholic Priests* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002).

8. E. Brooks Holifield, *God's Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America*, Pulpit & Pew (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007); Jones and Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence*; Mark D. Constantine, *Travelers on the Journey: Pastors Talk about Their Lives and Commitments*, Pulpit & Pew Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005); Jackson W. Carroll, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations*, Pulpit & Pew Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); Hoge, *The First Five Years of the Priesthood*.

9. The research reports are available from the Pulpit & Pew website.

10. Carroll, *God's Potters*, 102.

11. *Ibid.*, 107.

12. *Ibid.*

**Table 1.** Median hours worked by pastoral leaders

Task	Catholic	Mainline Protestant	Conservative Protestant	Historic Black
Preaching and worship (including preparation)	15	14	13	14
Congregational administration and meetings	13	7	4	4
Teaching and training	3	5	5	7
Visiting members or prospects	3	5	4	5
Pastoral counseling	4	3	2	3
Involvement in denominational or community affairs	4	4	4	4
All other tasks	3	3	4	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>42</b>

documented in Table 1, most pastors spent a very modest amount of time engaged in community or denominational affairs.

A second concern of the study was the commitment, level of satisfaction with their calling, and health of pastors. The data (self-reporting from pastors) show that only a minority express doubts about their calling to ministry. Carroll found that more than 60 percent of ministers never doubted their call to ministry and fewer than 8 percent doubted it fairly often or very often. A total of 5 percent considered leaving the ministry for a secular position fairly often or very often. Seventy percent never did.<sup>13</sup> There was a range in satisfaction with current ministry work. Table 2 summarizes these data.<sup>14</sup>

As the table documents, levels of satisfaction vary, depending on which aspect of ministry is under consideration. Thirteen percent reported being very dissatisfied or somewhat dissatisfied with the support of denominational officials. Seven out of 10 reported that they were very satisfied with their relationships with lay leaders. Two out of five reported that they were very satisfied with the overall effectiveness of their congregations. Two in five reported that they were very satisfied with their spiritual life. Three out of four affirmed that they were very satisfied with their current position and their family lives. Half of respondents reported that they

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13. *Ibid.*, 163.

14. *Ibid.*, 170.

**Table 2.** Clergy satisfaction (percent)

	Very Dissatisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Very Satisfied
<b>One's current congregation</b>				
Overall effectiveness of this congregation	1	4	59	36
Relationship with lay leaders	0	1	28	71
Relationship with other staff	0	2	25	73
<b>One's current position</b>				
Current position	0	2	24	74
Housing	1	6	19	74
Salary and benefits	2	6	41	51
<b>External support</b>				
Support of denominational officials	3	10	35	52
Relationship with fellow clergy	2	10	36	52
Continuing education opportunities	1	12	37	50
<b>Personal-spiritual</b>				
Family life	0	4	23	73
Spiritual life	0	5	53	42

were very satisfied with their salaries and benefits. To be sure, some clergy reported stress and dissatisfaction, but Carroll concluded that “the data suggest that the problems are not as widespread or bleak as some reports maintain.”<sup>15</sup>

As part of the Pulpit & Pew study, Constantine studied pastors in the southern United States who were intentionally relating faith to issues of public life, embodying what Joseph Reiff called the public church.<sup>16</sup> Constantine interviewed five Protestant ministers and one Catholic priest, each of whose ministries “serves the poor, the outcast, the suffering, and . . . the stranger.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, Constantine’s study focused on outliers—ministers

15. Ibid., 187.

16. Joseph Reiff, “Nurturing and Equipping Children in the ‘Public Church,’” in *Work, Family, and Religion in American Society*, ed. Nancy T. Ammerman and Wade Clark Roof (New York: Routledge, 1995), 203–204.

17. Constantine, *Travelers on the Journey*, 204.

who departed dramatically from the inward focus (serving the needs of members) that Carroll discovered.

## Excellence: What ministers should do and be

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In this century, there has been an upwelling of writing about what constitutes excellence in ministry, much of it building on Craig Dykstra's reflections about the pastoral imagination, first sketched in 2001.<sup>18</sup> The pastoral imagination is "a way of seeing into and interpreting the world which shapes everything [a pastor] thinks and does." This imagination is built through formal and informal education and ministerial experience. Good ministers, according to Dykstra, "possess something very special—a kind of internal gyroscope and a distinctive kind of intelligence."<sup>19</sup> Because the pastoral imagination is "shaped by time spent on the anvil of deep and sustained engagement in pastoral work" among living communities of faith, pastoral imagination only exists in dynamic interdependence with the ecclesial imagination of actual communities of faithful Christians.<sup>20</sup> What does the pastoral imagination look like? Dykstra contends that those with it employ multiple intelligences, are open to learning, and engage the Bible and theology. They also "have a truthful and nuanced understanding of how congregations and other institutions actually work" and "have clarity of mind and spirit about what it means to worship God in spirit and in truth."<sup>21</sup>

Building on Dykstra's ideas, Carroll argues that excellence in ministry must always be shaped by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>22</sup> Excellence in ministry is rooted in God's project for the world, not in the utilitarian calculations that businesses use. An excellent pastor has specific skills in reading local cultures to ask the critical question: "What are the

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18. Craig R. Dykstra, "Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination," in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig R. Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 41–61; Craig R. Dykstra, "The Pastoral Imagination," *Initiatives in Religion* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 1–2, 15; Craig R. Dykstra, "Pastoral Imagination and the Encouragement of Ministry," *Seminary Journal* 14, no. 2 (2008): 40–48.

19. Dykstra, "The Pastoral Imagination," 1.

20. Dykstra, "Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination," 42–43.

21. *Ibid.*, 52.

22. Carroll, *God's Potters*, 196–202 (see n. 8).

best and most appropriate ministry practices possible at this time and in this place for a particular pastor and his or her congregation?"<sup>23</sup> Excellent pastors are resilient and agile, tough enough to work through difficulties

“The goal of theological education is to produce beginning pastors who are interpreters of tradition and context, visionaries who seek to lead organizations in service of God’s kingdom.

and nimble enough to deal with novel challenges.<sup>24</sup> In a similar vein, Jones and Armstrong posit that excellent ministers are improvisational leaders and visionary interpreters. Their volume *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* grew out of a colloquium on excellence in ministry that was part of the larger Pulpit & Pew project.<sup>25</sup> Excellent pastors “read widely and [ask] provocative questions”; and they encourage themselves and others to “imagine new ways of faithful

discipleship.”<sup>26</sup> Jones and Armstrong also affirm that excellent pastors preach, teach, and do administrative work.<sup>27</sup> The book contains examples of pastors who embody excellence and inspire excellence in congregations. Jones and Armstrong argue that ministry is a calling, a profession, and an office. Ministers need to work against distorted understandings of their identity, such as a narcissistic understanding of calling.<sup>28</sup>

How does the literature about what pastors do, understood primarily as how they spend their time, relate to reflections about excellence in ministry? In the literature discussed above, Constantine alone drew clear

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23. Ibid., 196.

24. Ibid., 206–210.

25. Members of the colloquium were “lay and ordained, African American, Hispanic, and Anglo. We were male and female, serving churches large and small, urban and rural . . .” The group included people working in theological education, church-related colleges, and religious publishing houses. Jones and Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence* (ix).

26. Jones and Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence*, 129 (see n. 2).

27. Ibid., 104–110.

28. Ibid., 91.



implications about outstanding social justice ministry from his interviews. He identified eight imperatives and offered them for the reflection of theological educators. They are discussed in the next section. However, other assertions about excellence do not appeal to the results of empirical research very much. Dykstra's essays about the pastoral imagination *never* explicitly reference research on ministry. Carroll's assertion about the theological grounding of ministry in Jesus's death and resurrection stands on its own aside from any of his research findings. Carroll also argues that pastors need to be nimble—a claim stirring little controversy—but, again, he does not appeal to results of his own research as the basis for this assertion. In short, the literature about excellence frequently has little to do with empirical findings about the work of pastors.

## Advice to theological schools

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As a corollary to empirical research on the work that ministers do and reflections on excellence in ministry, commentators have offered suggestions to seminaries, one of the primary training grounds for pastoral leaders. Carroll suggests that more seminaries adopt the Lutheran practice (dating back to the 1930s) of requiring four years of full-time engagement to complete the MDiv, including a year-long internship. He acknowledges that this approach is not workable for many schools.<sup>29</sup> He also favors full-time, residential theological education while acknowledging that “this ideal is increasingly difficult to realize” because of the cost of going to school and the number of students “who are reluctant or unable to engage in a residential educational process.”<sup>30</sup> Residential, full-time engagement is better than alternative approaches because it is immersive and leads to the establishment of friendships that will serve students well later in ministry. Thus, Carroll's advice seems unlikely to change the practices of seminaries because of limitations of time and money.

Based on their understanding of excellence, Jones and Armstrong argue that seminaries need to train graduates who are visionaries and reconcilers. They need to be able to interpret the tradition and the world, and to improvise. Jones and Armstrong criticize what they call the

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29. Ibid., 228.

30. Ibid., 227.

conventional, relay-race model of the relationship between church and seminary. In this model, “congregations form people for ministry and then pass them on to seminaries for critical thinking, which then pass them on to the church to serve as pastors.”<sup>31</sup> There are problems with this model. Institutions responsible for each leg of the race (church and seminary) can point fingers at the other. The model also leads “to a distortion” in which “the seminaries have only, or perhaps primarily, a role in providing critical inquiry rather than formation.” They argue that a better image is a “pilgrimage that involves a variety of communal settings and institutions as partners on the journey towards God’s kingdom.”<sup>32</sup> If this image were taken seriously, theological schools would reject the notion that a student can learn everything she needs to know in seminary. They would also take formation seriously. Specifically, Jones and Armstrong argue that training for ministers should become more like training for physicians: “a rich combination of classroom study, practice, and apprenticeship.”<sup>33</sup> They specifically appeal to Dykstra’s notion of the pastoral imagination.<sup>34</sup> The goal of theological education is to produce beginning pastors who are interpreters of tradition and context, visionaries who seek to lead organizations in service of God’s kingdom.<sup>35</sup>

Based on his study of pastors dedicated to relating ministry to public life, Constantine concluded that eight concepts were important as theological schools imagine the best way to train future leaders.<sup>36</sup> He found that good leaders pay attention to the contexts of both congregation and the broader community beyond the membership of the congregations that they serve. They move beyond their comfort zones to work with partners and allies in the community. They do not ignore “complex issues of race and ethnicity.”<sup>37</sup> They earn the trust of members by spending time doing the ordinary work of teaching Bible studies and caring for members. They coordinate their efforts with others interested in social justice, taking seri-

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31. Ibid., 118–119.

32. Ibid., 119.

33. Ibid., 122.

34. Ibid., 123–125.

35. Ibid., 130–140.

36. Constantine, *Travelers on the Journey*, 197–220 (see n. 8).

37. Ibid., 204.

ously both the complexities of organizations and their distinctive power as pastors.

Two other recent publications regarding the work of seminaries, which fall outside of the orbit of the excellence literature, also require comment. The first is Ronald Vallet's *Stewards of the Gospel*. Vallet wants to create tighter links between the work of seminaries and the ministries of pastors. The theoretical link is stewardship, which he construes as the unifying concept of "God as creator and owner; Jesus Christ as chief steward; and the church as steward of the gospel."<sup>38</sup> The practical link is the office of *ministry integrator*. The function of a ministry integrator is to overcome the disjunction between how seminaries currently teach students and the actual needs of denominations and congregations. Vallet envisions a ministry integrator regularly meeting with theological educators, working pastors, and church leaders to share "what is going on in the life of the congregations and the larger church, as all strive to be stewards of the gospel."<sup>39</sup> As the seminary-church dialogue unfolds, faculty of theological schools will incrementally change their curricula to better form the next crop of steward-ministers.

“Good leaders pay attention to the contexts of both congregation and the broader community beyond the membership of the congregations that they serve. They move beyond their comfort zones to work with partners and allies in the community.”

The second publication is The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's study of pedagogy in theological schools, *Educating Clergy*. Grounded in visits to 18 seminaries and survey data, the authors focused squarely on the teaching practices. They discovered a series of signature pedagogies, each of which is distinctive to training religious leaders and analogous to how engineering schools use mathematics in

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38. Vallet, *Stewards of the Gospel*, 198 (see n. 1).

39. *Ibid.*, 220.

the classroom or law school professors analyze legal cases.<sup>40</sup> These pedagogies shape the imaginations of students so that they become skilled in interpreting texts and contexts, acquire dispositions and habits suitable for clergy, learn how to read historical and contemporary contexts, and perform such ministerial acts as leading worship. They describe instances of outstanding teaching to develop these desired outcomes and note differences in approaches and emphases at various schools. The researchers were impressed “by the shared commitment among seminary educators to the development of contemporary clergy as stewards of human meaning, identity, and action.”<sup>41</sup> They concluded that theological schools are “acutely aware” that they are accountable to theological traditions and denominational standards. Moreover, they concluded that schools balance these accountabilities “quite successfully.”<sup>42</sup> The researchers observed few explicit discussions about pedagogy in schools that they studied and gently suggested that more such discussions take place.<sup>43</sup> The overall tone of the study alternates between reverence and celebration.

According to the literature discussed here, what should theological schools do to improve? There are five suggestions: change requirements in ways that are admittedly unworkable (Carroll); take seriously eight key concepts (Constantine); train pastors in ways that more closely parallel how physicians are trained (Jones and Armstrong); hold ongoing conversations with church leaders (Vallet); and, perhaps, simply keep doing what they are already doing (Foster et al.).

## **Critique of advice**

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This section examines the quality of the advice presented above in more detail. It is important to begin with an acknowledgement of the great benefit to theological schools of a renewed discussion about pastoral excellence that was sparked by Dykstra’s keen insights. The excellence discussion is grounded in the work of ministers and goes beyond the

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40. Charles R. Foster, Lisa E. Dahill, Lawrence A. Golemon, and Barbara Wang Tolentino, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and the Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 32–33.

41. *Ibid.*, 363.

42. *Ibid.*, 375.

43. *Ibid.*, 369.

**Table 3.** Consensus model of pastoral excellence

Element	Excellent pastors . . .
Employ multiple intelligences	Are street smart, not just book smart.
Learn	Constantly learn from members, other community leaders, and by reading.
Engage the Bible and theology	Explicitly relate ministry to a Christian vision of the world.
Understand how congregations and institutions work	Make savvy use of bureaucratic procedures, not simply put up with them.
Have clarity about worship	Do not misuse the community's worship of God for inappropriate purposes.
Interpret microcultures	See the particular strengths, weaknesses, and values of a community.
Think critically about race and ethnicity	Are aware of the pervasive and subtle ways that people have been formed by the values of the dominant white culture.
Serve members	Take seriously the everyday joys and challenges that parishioners face and minister to them.
Take initiative and attract followers	Have a vision and make that vision compelling to church members.

rarified discussions of the 1980s and 1990s about what is and ought to be distinctively theological about theological education.<sup>44</sup> Most of the published research about the work of American pastors in the twenty-first century grows directly from Dykstra's initiative at Lilly Endowment Inc. Constantine's work, notwithstanding his caveats, is a splendid example of ethnographic field work in the tradition of grounded theory.<sup>45</sup> The suggestions that he offers to those engaged in theological education flow from what he learned as he observed and interviewed ministers engaged intentionally in justice work rooted in Christian faith.

Faculty members and administrators of theological schools, beyond all doubt, want to produce excellent graduates to serve the church and the world. Table 3 summarizes what might be called a consensus model of an excellent pastor based on the commitments, skills, and aptitudes identified

44. Edward Farley, *The Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church and the University* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988); Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); David H. Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993); David H. Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological About a Theological School* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

45. Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research, Observations* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967).

by the literature reviewed in the first three parts of this paper. While the table attempts to be faithful to the literature on excellence, thoughtful readers may add their own additional elements. For instance, the list says nothing about expertise in using social media in service of Christian ministry.<sup>46</sup> The list is silent about money.

If what excellence in ministry looks like is summarized in these nine elements, what should theological educators *do differently* so that their graduates embody this excellence? Herein lies the problem with the three literatures sketched here. Jones and Armstrong suggest, without adducing any proof, that seminaries are failing to produce excellent pastors. The central part of their critique states that seminaries undervalue formation. ATS standards call upon all theological schools to take formation seriously, albeit along with skills for theological reflection and pastoral action.<sup>47</sup> One hazards to guess that all academic deans at ATS-accredited schools would describe the MDiv curriculum at their respective schools as precisely the combination of classroom study and supervised ministry practice that Jones and Armstrong say is appropriate to form excellent leaders.

Comparing the consensus list with Carroll's data about ministers' levels of satisfaction with the effectiveness of the congregations, one notices that 95 percent of ministers surveyed were somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with overall effectiveness of their congregations. This self-reporting suggests that seminaries have succeeded in training pastors to serve effective congregations. On the other hand, Carroll's data show that ministers and priests spend the vast majority of their time leading worship, preaching, and serving members. Most spend little time serving those outside of their parish family. If excellence requires taking action in the broader community, the focus of Constantine's study, then the data suggest that the vast majority of congregational ministers lack excellence in extra-parish ministry, if

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46. Mark Morgan Stephenson, *Web-Empowered Ministry: Connecting with People through Websites, Social Media, and More* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011).

47. "A theological school is a community of faith and learning that cultivates habits of theological reflection, nurtures wise and skilled ministerial practice, and contributes to the formation of spiritual awareness and moral sensitivity." ATS General Institutional Standard 3, available from [www.ats.edu](http://www.ats.edu). Several years before his work on *Resurrecting Excellence*, Jones wrote in glowing terms about the program for spiritual formation that his own divinity school developed. See L. Gregory Jones and Willie James Jennings, "Formed for Ministry: A Program in Spiritual Formation," *Christian Century*, Feb. 2, 2000, 124–128.

for no other reason than they devote so little time to it. If seminaries were to devote more energy to training ministers for advocacy ministry beyond the parish, they would then be training students to do things that, for whatever reasons, they are unlikely to do after ordination.

Based on the reading of the literature presented here, it is profoundly unclear whether the relationship between theological schools and the churches that they serve has broken down or whether seminaries simply do not produce excellent graduates. The Carnegie Foundation study concluded that the seminaries studied were doing good work, producing the stewards that Vallet calls for. Even if the seminary-church relationship could be improved, the literature provides little clear direction for what seminaries ought to do to reform. Schools are already accountable to ATS and their churchly constituencies through formal mechanisms like accreditation and the acid tests of constituency loyalty and fundraising. In practice, virtually every divinity school and seminary that seeks accreditation clears the bars set by accrediting bodies. Moreover, schools continue to attract students and donors if and only if they are perceived to be the kind of schools that are worthy of support. While only a few seminaries were recently recognized by Faith3 as schools that are changing the world,<sup>48</sup> all seminaries that stay in business are perceived to serve the churches vibrantly enough that they continue to attract ministerial students. The quality of a seminary's graduates cannot be weighed like gold bars on a scale.<sup>49</sup> The call to reframe the church-seminary relationship as a pilgrimage toward God's kingdom does little to tell schools how to move from the way things work now to a more faithful or more effective future.

## Four ways forward

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This paper has identified disconnections between discussions about improving ministerial preparation in theological schools, research on the everyday work of pastors in congregations, and the aspirational literature

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48. For a list of schools, see <http://stctw.faith3.org/>

49. To be sure, there is circularity here: a school asserts its value because churches find what the school does to be valuable. But this is the unsurprising circularity of money (Felix Martin, *Money: The Unauthorized Biography*, New York: A. A. Knopf, 2014), a community of practice (Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed., Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), or any socially constructed good (John R. Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).



of pastoral excellence. How can these disconnections be overcome? Four approaches may be fruitful.

First, church and seminary leaders should drop the rhetoric of excellence and replace it with the rhetoric of *competencies* (plural). Competence, for example, in the conduct of worship is not inextricably linked to competence in pastoral care or in addressing the problem of homelessness in one's city. And what counts as competence in one ministry setting may be considered beside the point in other settings, as the literature of excellence itself notices. The rhetoric of excellence also leads to research programs focused on splendid outliers. The churches need to increase the proportion of competent ministers, not simply celebrate pastoral brilliance when it occurs. Carroll soberly reports, "In the course of our research we did observe clergy whose work seemed to be at best average rather than excellent and others who seemed below average and often in trouble."<sup>50</sup> To be sure, studying outliers can lead to insights that help the formation of all seminary students; however, leaders of theological schools have an obligation to care about the skills, knowledge, and dispositions of all students in their charge. The shift from the poetic language of excellence to the accounting language of competency is not a loss but a genuine gain. It is a gain precisely because it enables discrete sorts of ministerial competencies to be talked about with precision. The work that ministers do is holy, varied, and important. Leaders in seminaries and churches can talk about discrete ministerial competencies without disrespecting the call of God or demeaning the faithfulness of the clergy.

Second, critics and friends of theological schools need to recognize the inevitability of some slack between the work of seminaries and the actual work of pastors. In terms of organizational theory, these two endeavors have loose coupling.<sup>51</sup> Simply put, what happens in ministry is not a direct output of the ways that schools shape the minds and hearts of students. One of the virtues of the literature about excellence is the notion that excellent (dare one say competent) pastoral leaders do not leave seminary fully trained for the future. Competent pastoral leaders continue learning. One of the reasons that competent ministers need to be lifelong learners is that the seminary curriculum of 2014 cannot be perfectly aligned with the unknown ministry needs of pastors in 2030 in Williston, North

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50. Carroll, *God's Potters*, 192 (see n. 8).

51. David G. Forney, "Tethered Together: A Study of the Relationship between a Seminary and Its Denomination," *Theological Education* 41, no. 1 (2005): 117–135.



**1** *Church and seminary leaders should drop the rhetoric of excellence and replace it with the rhetoric of competencies (plural).*

**2** *Critics and friends of theological schools need to recognize the inevitability of some slack between the work of seminaries and the actual work of pastors.*

**3** *Researchers should conduct qualitative studies that focus on the intersection of theological education and the practice of ministry.*

**4** *Those who care about improving theological education or about improving the vibrancy of ministry must care about both and must look over the fences that divide disciplines and professional foci.*

Dakota, and Eagle Pass, Texas. The wearying shadow that darkens efforts to revivify Protestant theological education is the continued change in how Christians in North America live their faith. In this turbulent cultural context, theological schools alone do not bear the burden of discerning and creating the future. Loose coupling simply recognizes that the relationship between church life and seminaries is far from billiard ball causality.

A third approach to improve connections between the work of seminaries and ministers involves conducting research that focuses on the intersection of theological education and the practice of ministry. Researchers should conduct empirical studies about the working mindsets of theological educators and the mindsets of ministers. There is no published literature that talks about connection or disconnection between what professors think the work of pastors is and how pastors perceive their vocations. If professors think that what they are teaching already fits the ministry world of twenty-first-century pastors, calls to reform theological education will not be heeded. When there is no perceived problem, there is no reason to make changes. Qualitative research in this area can supplement the findings of quantitative approaches like Carroll's. Both data sets would contribute to the helpful integrative discussions between church leaders, ministers, and theological school leaders that Vallet calls for.

Finally, those who care about improving theological education *or* about improving the vibrancy of ministry must care about *both* and must

look over the fences that divide disciplines and professional foci. While a call to interdisciplinary breadth is about as novel as suggesting that both nutrition and exercise affect human health, improvement in the alignment of the work of seminaries and the work of ministers and congregations requires constant attention to three discrete research areas: congregational life, the work of ministers, and theological education.<sup>52</sup> Only then can parallel conversations become a single (complex!) conversation.

## Summary

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This paper has argued that published literature about the work of Protestant ministers in the twenty-first century stands mostly apart from literature about pastoral excellence. Both of these literatures seek to offer advice to theological schools but, in many cases, simply exhort them to do things that they already do. This paper puts forward four specific ways to overcome this impasse. First, those who care about the improvement of ministry and theological education should replace the rhetoric of excellence with the rhetoric of competencies. Second, the inherently loose coupling between the work of seminaries and the work of ministries should be acknowledged without recriminations. Third, in order to enrich conversations about the seminary-ministry relationship with more qualitative data, researchers should explore what seminary professors think that pastors do. Finally, conversations need to cross disciplinary and professional divides. Implementing these suggestions will not permanently fix anything (*semper reformanda*) but can open up new ways to link the training of ministers with the work of twenty-first-century ministry. God calls us to nothing less.

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52. Keeping up with changes in the corporate and individual expressions of the Christian life may be the hardest task of all. Virtual churches and emerging churches in both progressive and conservative Protestantism now proudly proclaim that they are not one's grandmother's kind of church. For an introduction to the current messy situation, see Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008).



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