

Theological Education

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ISSUE FOCUS

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Celebrating the Future of Theological Schools

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Continuing the Conversation

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

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Editor's Introduction

Stephen R. Graham

This issue of *Theological Education* reports on a four-year Lilly Endowment funded project on the relationship between theological schools and the church. The ATS Biennial Meeting in 2004 launched the project. That fall, a 20-member task force including theological educators and representatives from congregations and judicatories began exploring the multifaceted and rapidly changing relationships between theological schools and the congregations they serve. Questions guiding the project were:

- How well are the schools meeting the needs of the churches today?
- What can we say about the kind of leadership the churches will need in the future?
- What kind of preparation will those leaders require?
- How would ATS accrediting standards need to change to allow this future to become a reality?

Reflecting the diversity of the Association, the task force included representatives of the Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, and evangelical Protestant ecclesial families.

Members were:

- Laura S. Mendenhall, Chair, President of Columbia Theological Seminary
- Faith E. Rohrbough, ATS Adjunct Staff, retired President, Lutheran Theological Seminary Saskatoon
- Daniel O. Aleshire, Executive Director, The Association of Theological Schools
- Leith Anderson, Senior Pastor, Wooddale Church, Eden Prairie, Minnesota; President of the National Association of Evangelicals
- Phyllis Anderson, President, Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary
- Ron Benefiel, President, Nazarene Theological Seminary
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- Timothy P. Weber, Senior Consultant, Higher Education Practice, EFL Associates
- James Wind, President, The Alban Institute
- Peter Wyatt, immediate past Principal, Emmanuel College of Victoria University
- Gabino Zavala, Auxiliary Bishop, Archdiocese of Los Angeles

The task force read a number of significant books and articles on the nature and changing character of the churches in the twenty-first century, engaged leaders of congregations from regions across the United States and Canada in “fishbowl” conversations, commissioned historical studies about the relationship between theological schools and the church in the United States and Canada, and discussed and debated their findings. There was a great deal to learn about participants’ individual faith communities and the distinctive challenges faced by each as well as to discover the common issues faced by all. One of the most basic and substantive findings of the study, though not a surprise, was that theological schools and congregations need to communicate more effectively with one another. Perhaps better, they need to find new and creative ways not only to communicate more effectively but to work together to prepare leaders as well.

Because the material in this issue contains reports and reflections on the work of the task force, this volume is of a somewhat different character than other issues of *Theological Education*.

Daniel Aleshire sets the tone—or perhaps I should say sets the pace—with his Biennial Meeting address from 2008, “Making Haste Slowly,” in which he uses the dance tempo, “slow, slow, quick, quick,” to illustrate the challenges facing theological schools. They need to “make haste slowly” and figure out ways to respond quickly to the challenges they face while at the same time acting deliberately to ensure appropriate action and stewardship of their rich treasures of heritage and identity.

A brief history of the project that outlines the activities of the task force is presented by Faith Rohrbough, retired president of Lutheran Theological Seminary Saskatoon, who served as project director.

Four “ecology” reflective essays from members of the task force report on the meetings and conversations that helped illuminate the situation from the perspectives of the different ecclesial families represented within The Association of Theological Schools as well as the distinctive circumstances of theological education in Canada. They take us inside the work of the group and in some cases even let us “hear” the voices of those involved in the discussions. The ecology essays include a number of quotations from particular participants in the conversation that are presented without attribution because they reflect the thinking of the entire group.

Two church historians, Sandra Beardsall and Timothy Weber, provide background to the relationships between theological schools and the church from the perspective of Canada and the United States respectively. Written

early on in the project, these essays played an important role in helping the task force attend to the different historical circumstances that influenced developments both north and south of the border. They also provide crucial insight into the way theological education has developed and how the nature of the relationship with the church has changed over the years.

As a summary of the project, the task force crafted a set of recommendations that were presented to the ATS membership at its Biennial Meeting in June 2008. The task force included insightful recommendations for leaders of theological schools, congregations, and judicatories, as well as for the Association and the Commission on Accrediting.

These materials are presented with the hope that they can encourage and challenge all of those named above to united effort in the common work of preparing leaders for the church in this time of unprecedented change.

Making Haste Slowly: Celebrating the Future of Theological Schools

Daniel O. Aleshire

The Association of Theological Schools

In this article, the author uses the dance rhythm “slow step, slow step, quick step, quick step” to illustrate the need for theological schools in this time of extraordinary change within the church and the world to “make haste slowly” in order to meet those challenges. First presented as an address to the Association’s Biennial Meeting in June 2008, the article describes the work of the Association’s project on Theological Schools and the Church and outlines the project’s recommendations to ATS schools, to the Association, and to the Commission on Accrediting. Theological schools are remarkably enduring and durable earthen vessels, Aleshire argues, but they must do some new things and do them quickly in order to fulfill their missions effectively in the future.

It is a phrase that struck me from Glenn Miller’s history of Protestant theological education from 1870 to 1970. It wasn’t a new phrase to him or to the century he was writing about. Making haste slowly—*festina lente*—is a principle that Augustus Caesar thought was important in leadership and a phrase that Benjamin Franklin included in *Poor Richard’s Almanac*. I could tell you even more if I had taken time to go to all 229,000 websites that Google found in .20 seconds, but then I was in a hurry. I did go to one website advertising a workshop on “how to make haste slowly”—which I thought could help me with this speech—but it happened last year. I guess, sometimes, you have to make haste quickly.

Conrad Cherry titled his history of university divinity schools *Hurrying Toward Zion*. The dust cover has a marvelous picture of William Rainey Harper wearing his academic gown, walking a few steps ahead of John D. Rockefeller Jr., who was dressed in top hat and morning coat, on their way to a University of Chicago graduation—hurrying toward Zion.

Hurrying is the pace of seminary administration. You will have to hurry to squeeze in some vacation before the rush of preparation for fall semester, during which you will hurry from greeting new students, to meetings with potential donors, to preparing for the fall meeting of the board, to travel to congregations, then to meetings in airport hotels and denominational offices. Increasingly, the pace of faculty life has quickened as well. Information grows at a faster rate than it can be assimilated and interpreted. Theological research digs ever deeper into ever more specialized areas of inquiry, and just when we need the slow sweep of a grand narrative to provide perspective, postmodern criticism tells us to be suspicious of them. So, we hurry from one contextual narrative to the next, digging deeper and narrower.

This spring, a congregation in Pittsburgh invited Anne Lamott to speak in celebration of its fortieth anniversary. She read many sections from her most

recent book, *Grace Eventually*,¹ and then moved to other thoughtful reflections on life and the Christian faith, peppered with some political commentary. Lamott is a thoughtful and unique Christian, in her words “devout with a bad attitude.” One phrase from her presentation has stayed with me. She told us that she had taken up ballroom dancing, and she described the rhythm of one dance she learned: slow step, slow step, then quick step, quick step. As she proceeded through her talk, this phrase became a recurring refrain and a description of the rhythm of human life and the work of the Spirit: slow, slow, quick-quick.

Theological schools are hurrying, and there seems to be no real alternative to the pace. Maybe our most faithful effort is to make sure that, as we hurry, we hurry toward *Zion*, and that, as we make haste, we *make haste slowly*. And, maybe, the rhythm ballroom dancing is teaching Anne Lamott could teach theological schools a thing or two. Maybe it is the rhythm that will help us avoid making haste too hastily or hurrying toward *Zion* but bypassing the Kingdom of God among us.

I present two points for your consideration: The first is hurrying toward *Zion*, by which I mean the relationship of theological schools and the churches they serve. The second is about making haste slowly, by which I mean honoring the work and contributions of theological schools as we move into a new and, no doubt, different future.

Hurrying toward Zion

Michael A. Battle, president of Interdenominational Theological Center, told an ATS audience a few years ago that the church is necessary for the seminary, but the seminary is not necessary for the church. He went on to say that the church needs education for its leaders and theological reflection to inform its work, but it doesn't necessarily require the current version of theological schools to meet those needs. The seminary, on the other hand, cannot exist without the church. If no community sends students to seminary, if no denomination or congregation wants to hire seminary graduates, then most ATS schools would wither and die like cursed fig trees. I know this is an arguable hypothesis, but after it is parsed and qualified, I think it remains true. The future of the seminary depends on communities of faith. While schools must be in a hurry these days, their future depends on their hurrying toward *Zion*, hurrying in the direction of the church's greatest needs.

The church is in a hurry, too, and seems to be hurrying away from a past that it does not want to abandon toward a future that it does not fully understand. Mainline Protestants have experienced consecutive decades of declining membership resulting, among other things, in a loss of its long-standing role as establishment Protestantism in North America. While evangelical Protestants surged in numbers and social influence in the last fifty years, some denominations are experiencing flattened growth or slight decline. The Roman Catholic Church has weathered the clergy sex abuse crisis but is living into the heaviness of the two-plus billion dollar cost of that failure. The number of priestly vocations is not increasing, and 20 percent of all ministerial priesthood candidates preparing to serve in North American dioceses are foreign-

born. Congregations continue to change. Mark Chaves's follow-up study to one he conducted earlier this decade² indicates that even more churchgoers are attending larger membership congregations and an even smaller percentage are attending smaller ones.

Given these and other changes, congregations are hungry for practical strategies, and denominations, accommodating to one more round of budget cuts, grope for effective responses to pressing problems. Theological schools are designed to ask hard questions of the long tradition at a time when churches want answers they can use in next week's service or next year's program. The church needs theological schools to help it define the reason for its faith—but when congregations are trying to figure out how to last another year, they can underestimate their need for these resources. If the church survives, but has forgotten the reason for the hope that lies within it, survival won't mean much.

Theological schools are intellectual centers for the church, but it does not follow that they are its primary centers of learning. Some crucial lessons are best learned in parishes and congregations. School learning focuses on books, lectures, discussions, and experiences, and has a measured, disciplined process. In times of rapid change, the Spirit of God is at work, usually in unpredictable ways, and the first fruits of that work are often most evident in congregational life. Seminaries need to take seriously the faithful learning that occurs in congregations and parishes, and as centers of intellectual life, learn from the church's learning.

Schools and churches need each other, but they dance to different rhythms. Schools are slow step, slow step, and in these days, the best of congregations tend to be quick-quick. They need each other, but with their different rhythms, they end up stepping on each other's toes. In the present moment, however, the struggles that sometimes characterize the church/theological school relationship need to be put aside. This is a time when the schools, with all their flaws, need to reaffirm their need for the church, with all its flaws. This is the time when the incredible strength of good theological schools needs to join with the untapped capacity of the church, and in partnership, guide the Christian project in North America through a pregnant time. If the last century had its share of slow steps, we now seem to be in the quick-quick part of the dance, and seminaries need to learn new steps.

Four years ago, at the Garden Grove Biennial Meeting, I introduced you to some of the churches in my home town in Ohio and chronicled the ways in which they had changed since my family moved there fifty years earlier. One of the unidentified pictures in that presentation showed the small, white-clapboard Concord United Methodist Church. When I was growing up, it was located in open country. The farms around that church building have been replaced by sub-divisions and strip malls, and I noticed this spring that the building—stained glass windows, steeple, and all—was now the Concord Chapel Pet Hospital. There are thriving United Methodist churches in the area, but this picture postcard of a church must have been slow stepping when the dance called for quick-quick. Much is changing in the church, and theological schools need to listen carefully, think creatively, and act engagingly.

Theological Schools and the Church project

Since 2004, a thoughtful task force has been at work on the Association's project on Theological Schools and the Church. The task force has commissioned papers; discussed issues with American and Canadian church historians; studied issues related to each of the three large ecclesial families of ATS schools; and listened to pastors and judicatory leaders discuss their own theological education, the work of ministry in their settings, and the issues that new pastors and church workers are facing. A central finding from all of these activities is change, and this change is occurring at quick-quick tempo.

The task force's conclusions and recommendations are both simple and significant.

Recommendations to schools

The task force is recommending, in a variety of ways, that theological schools listen carefully to pastors and lay leaders. Good schools have always done that, of course, but as patterns of denominational connectedness are changing, new patterns of communication need to be established. Many faculty members have served congregations, but so much has been happening over such a short period of time that prior experience may not be very instructive about the present situation. This listening needs to be intellectually engaged. Good pastors know more than they learned in theological schools, and seminaries need to listen as if they were students, take careful notes, and consider implications for the curriculum and degree requirements. The task force is calling for conversation and dialogue, to be sure, but its most urgent plea is for a close listening—like the close reading of a text—a disciplined, careful, attentive listening. The task force sponsored five regional meetings this past year in which twenty or so theological educators sat in a circle and listened to five or six pastors talk about ministry and their theological education for an hour and a half. After the session, the whole group had a conversation over lunch, and then the theological educators met alone to discuss what they had heard. In almost every one of these discussions, someone suggested that a similar listening session would be good for his or her school but that the school had never done anything like that. This may be a time when listening is as necessary a scholarly activity as reading.

After schools have listened carefully, they are in the best place to convene conversations among groups that sometimes talk *past* each other more than *with* each other: pastors, lay persons, judicatory officers, seminary faculty, denominational leaders, and members of pastoral search committees. People in all of these roles know part of the story, and it takes all of them together, in conversation over time, to get the full picture. Because a theological school is responsible for the whole story, it befits its role to convene and sustain these kinds of conversations. Because a theological school is a *school*, it should use these conversations as an intellectual inquiry into how the church has changed, is changing, and needs to change and—correspondingly—how the seminary has changed, is changing, and needs to change.

Recommendations to the Association

The task force is recommending that ATS engage strategies that will enhance the academic study of congregational reality and pastoral practice. In its programs and research grants to faculty, the Association should seek to elevate the scholarly significance of research that enhances pastoral practice and advances congregational mission. Research is needed to help pastors, denominations, and congregations resolve practical conundrums, but there is a tendency for theological schools to undervalue this kind of “practical” intellectual effort. The seminary where I taught before joining the ATS staff had a custom that faculty members presented a formal address after receiving tenure. When my turn came, I stood in cap and gown in front of a robed faculty and others and gave an address titled “Finding Eagles in the Turkey’s Nest.” I spoke as a practical theologian who had perceived that practical studies in theological schools were sometimes viewed as the turkey’s nest, a place where the soaring eagles of biblical and theological studies would never roost. I went on to say that I had discovered eagles—theological insight and understanding—in the turkey’s nest. I should have known from my study of the Revelation that animal imagery is prone to misinterpretation in theological settings. Some of my former colleagues never forgave me. I was arguing that as individual believers hold onto theological commitments and as communities of faith act out those commitments, theological construals are seen from another angle of vision, and their meaning can take on new depth and texture.

The task force is not calling for a new definition of pastoral studies or a new way to teach it; it is recommending that the Association lend its energy to draw attention to what appears to be an understudied subject and, at times, an undervalued area of study. Schools know a great deal about academic talent and the intellectual gifts it requires, but the task force concluded that schools may know less about the intellectual gifts—what Craig Dykstra has termed pastoral imagination³—that makes pastoral work effective. The efforts of the Association in this regard will greatly benefit from the work of one of theological education’s best partners—Lilly Endowment—which is funding programs at a number of institutions to develop new models of PhD education in practical theology. These programs hold the promise of providing the skill and talent that an enhanced area of inquiry will require.

Recommendations to the Commission

The task force has also made some recommendations to the Commission on Accrediting. One theme in their conclusions is that congregations and talented pastoral leaders should be brought into the seminary’s inner academic circle. Most ATS schools willingly permit students to earn credits for Clinical Pastoral Education in a certified CPE program. Is there a way for congregations to be certified for similar patterns of education—not as field education sites but as teaching partners with the school? Could the quality of a school’s interaction with its ecclesial constituents be the subject of a revised accrediting standard? Could the wall that accrediting standards tend to build between academic settings and practice settings be lowered or at least made more permeable?

Theological schools are not prone to act quickly. They know how to tackle a problem by impaneling a committee that works for an academic year on a background paper for discussion at the fall faculty retreat, the results of which will be used by another committee to develop strategies to present by the last faculty meeting of the year, which are then discussed and finally voted on in a somewhat revised formulation, usually with at least one faculty member abstaining from the vote for principle, then given to the dean to implement the next year, if the funding can be found. Slow step. Slow step. ATS works the same way. The task force's worry is that the changes in the church have moved the dance to quick-quick, and slow step processes won't work.

Surely by now, some of you are thinking "haste makes waste" (for which Google found 1,500,000 website entries in .17 seconds). And, of course, it can make waste. But then there is Concord Chapel Pet Hospital to think about. As schools hurry toward Zion, they need to "make haste slowly." It is still haste, still faster than slow-step-slow-step, but it does not abandon the good that schools do best as they learn new ways to be good.

Making haste slowly

ATS is celebrating ninety years of organizational life with this meeting. It struck me, as I was preparing for it, that I have worked in theological education a third of that time—as have many of you. It has become my life's work, and I cannot think of any other area of ministry in which I would rather invest my calling. I've been a student at several schools, but none of them influenced me like the *theological* school I attended. My experience is not unique. It was reflected in the stories of the pastors on the video that opened this meeting, and their comments are typical of all the pastors who were interviewed this past year. They bear witness to the promise of theological schools. Good theological education stimulates thinking, warms hearts, prompts service, and continues to influence graduates' lives.

We have mentioned earthen vessels often in this meeting. Craig Dykstra referred to the 2 Corinthians text in his opening address, and our worship leaders reflected on it and exegeted it yesterday. We sang ". . . we have this treasure in earthen vessels . . ." (2 Cor. 4:7, KJV). Earthen vessels are remarkably durable. Occasionally, an archeological excavation unearths an intact vessel. It can still hold water, thousands of years after it was formed. The long, useful life of earthen vessels is characteristic of theological schools. They are built to last, and they are very durable. But, like earthen vessels, these schools are also fragile. Careless use can damage them. They require care and attention. Maybe most important for our day, unlike wineskins, earthen vessels can hold both new wine and old wine. They can hold water and wine; they can even hold water turning to wine. At a time when change is a dominant characteristic of religious life in North America, it is reassuring that a school that served in one way in an earlier era can serve in another way in another era.

It is time for theological schools, these earthen vessels, to do some new things, and do them quickly. It is also time for schools to remember what they do well and commit themselves to doing it better. This past year, I worked on

a book about theological schools.⁴ Our schools face many demands, sometimes harsh criticism, and more than a few questions about their value. I wanted to make the case, once again, for the importance of these schools to communities of faith and the faith they affirm. I wanted readers to get a glimpse of what theological schools do when they do their work well. I wanted board members and donors to understand why these schools are worth the effort and money that it takes to keep them functioning. I want to share some of my conclusions with you—because all of you are in a hurry and may not have time to read the book.

First of all, theological schools are an indispensable resource for learning for religious vocation. This vocation flourishes when people understand the Christian story, understand human frailty and faithful responses to it, comprehend the gospel's vision of wholeness for individuals and communities, and know how to lead in ways that increase human healing, personal righteousness, and social justice. Religious vocation requires ministers to negotiate the complex tasks of working with people, exercising leadership, struggling through conflict, making sense of human ambiguity, and getting the job done faithfully. The learning that cultivates these qualities grows out of disciplined study of texts and traditions, critical reflection on experience, and personal engagement in community. It requires contexts that provide sustained, integrated, formational education—exactly the contexts that theological schools cultivate. The educational settings of theological schools maximize the potential for students to learn complex lessons well and, in learning those lessons, to be formed intellectually, spiritually, and morally. Theological schools incubate the kind of theological understanding that contributes to responsible life in faith and faithful leadership of religious communities.

Second, theological schools are called to teach the tradition. Jesus was a rabbi—“teacher”—and his ministry has been followed by faithful persons who are teachers of the church. Theological schools provide the ideal setting for the development of teachers and the exercise of their art. Seminary faculty members teach their courses, to be sure, but almost all of them teach and preach in congregations. From leading worship to adult education classes, to writing for denominational and parachurch publications, to conferences and workshops—faculty members are teachers of the church, not just of the students in their classes. As centers of teaching, theological schools provide a crucial resource for the work of communities of faith.

Third, theological schools are also centers of research, and when that research is done with intellectual sophistication *and* appropriate attention to the needs of communities of faith, it helps the church remember the past, evaluate the present, envision the future, and live faithfully in relationship to all three. Each era of Christian life must identify the truest understanding of the long tradition, the most intellectually faithful Christian witness, and the most honest engagement of the church with the culture. Theological schools provide an ideal setting for this kind of intellectual work. Theological research takes time, library resources, the stimulation and methodological correction of other researchers, the questions that students raise, and an informed understanding of a wide range of issues. While other settings can support intellectual work, schools are one of the best settings for theological research. As centers of faith-

ful and rigorous inquiry, schools support the efforts of faith communities to locate the underpinnings of their beliefs in the intellectual idiom of their time and culture.

Finally, theological schools generate more than the sum of learning, teaching, and research. When learning for religious vocation, teaching ministers and church members, and theological research are done in close connection with one another, over time, in communities of common interest, the result is fundamentally different than if these activities were done separately. Each is enhanced when performed in the context of the others, and a theological school provides a singular context that brings them together in expectation and practice and promise.

Theological schools are worth the money. The education they provide is worth the effort. The contribution they make to communities of faith is worth the investment. In a time when new seminary students know less of the Christian tradition than previous generations, when North American culture is less aware of the Christian story than it has ever been, and when the work of ministry has become more complex and less predictable than ever before, the educational response cannot be to lower expectations. In an era like this one, theological learning needs to be enhanced, and the work of theological schools becomes even more important. Communities of faith need pastors, ministers, priests, and theologically educated lay leaders who have learned the lessons our schools teach.

Conclusion

Our present moment seems to be a discontinuous point in history. Most often, the present flows with some degree of predictability from the past. Slow step, slow step. Sometimes, however, the path from the present to the future is discontinuous. The dance turns quick-quick. Nothing in the horse and buggy era could have predicted the social changes that the automobile would bring. If it is a discontinuous moment, and the future is less predictable than at other historical moments, can we be hopeful about the future of theological schools? Yes, and that is a “yes” with confidence.

We can be hopeful because theological schools are vessels with an incredible capacity to endure. We can be hopeful because institutions can change and discover ways to meet future needs. We can be hopeful because theological schools will continue to provide formational education, both in terms of Christian identity and ministerial leadership. They will probably have less money than this kind of education truly requires, but they will find a way to do it. Theological schools will respond to changes in the church more slowly than the church would like and much faster than academic purists would like—but they will change. The future will be multidirectional, and we can be hopeful because schools will find the varied and variegated educational forms that the future will need. The educational capacity of theological schools will be changed and enhanced, and ministers and priests, lay persons and seekers will learn in-depth about the faith that gives them life.

When I was in elementary school, my parents gave me a King James Bible. While I tried to read it, the elegant but incomprehensible language of many passages baffled me. I remember being particularly stumped by a verse in John 3: “the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth . . .” I was in the fifth grade, I think, and was sure that I should be able to understand this verse—after all, it was from John 3—but I couldn’t. I remember writing it out in long-hand, dropping all the “eths,” but it remained a mystery. Fifty years later, I have discovered that my not understanding was, in some ways, an accurate understanding. God’s presence, like the wind, does not reveal its origin or destination; its movement can be felt, and its effect experienced, but the ways of God are, from beginning to end, mysterious. The God of ages past is the God of ages to come. The wind will blow. The purposes of God will sustain communities of faith and call new ones into being. Those communities will need pastors and teachers who know the story, who have learned a theological wisdom pertaining to responsible life of faith, and who are capable of leading communities in pursuit of God’s vision for the human family. These pastors and teachers will need schools because schools provide the kind of learning they most need. The Spirit of God moves, and we do not know “whence it cometh or whither it goeth,” but we can be confident that God will be up to something, working out God’s purposes, calling into being what those purposes require for every age.

Slow step, slow step, quick-quick. Hurry toward Zion. Make haste slowly. *Festina lente*. It is time to do what good schools have always done, only better. It is time for good schools to do things they have never done before. The water is changing into wine before our eyes. We work with vessels that can hold both. The future is calling.

Daniel O. Aleshire is executive director of The Association of Theological Schools and, along with Faith Rohrbough, directed the Theological Schools and the Church project.

ENDNOTES

1. Anne Lamott, *Grace (Eventually): Thoughts on Faith* (New York: Penguin Group, 2007).
2. Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). The data for the follow-up study are not yet published.
3. See Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, eds., *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, especially Dykstra’s essay, “Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination” (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008).
4. Daniel Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008).

Brief History of Task Force Meetings of the Theological Schools and the Church Project

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The director of the Theological Schools and the Church project describes issues the task force undertook and the concerns evolving out of the meetings that included participants from the three broad ecclesial families in ATS and represented by school faculties and boards, area clergy, and lay people.

In 2003 ATS submitted a proposal to Lilly Endowment for a three-year grant to study the relationship of theological colleges to their ecclesial communities. At the 2004 ATS Biennial Meeting, this topic was the central theme of the gathering and the basis of all three major events: a PowerPoint presentation by ATS Executive Director Daniel Aleshire on the changes that have taken place over the past fifty years in the churches in his home town of Grove City, Ohio; small group discussions by all meeting participants; and a panel of persons who had experience in seminaries, judicatories, and/or other groups related to theological education.

In the fall of 2004, the ATS Executive Board¹ appointed a twenty-member task force to undertake the study. The majority were school presidents/principals across the three broad ecclesial families of ATS membership: Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant, and evangelical Protestant. The task force also included two seminary faculty members, a Roman Catholic bishop, a parish pastor, and the director of the Alban Institute.

Faith Rohrbough, president emerita of the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Saskatoon, and Daniel Aleshire served as directors of the project. Timothy Weber, former faculty member, dean, and president of institutions of graduate theological education, was commissioned to prepare a paper on the history of patterns of relationship between theological schools and ecclesial communities.

The task force met six times over the next three-and-a-half years. During the first two meetings, the group's discussion covered a variety of topics. The 2004 Biennial Meeting presentations and responses were the primary basis for discussion, along with an initial draft of Weber's history paper. Some of the members held focus groups at their schools to get input from faculty, board members, area clergy, and lay people. Task force members also elected to read some background material on the three broad ecclesial families represented in ATS to have a better sense of the milieu out of which each participant came.

The first meeting identified many of the issues that would continue to grow in importance for the task force:

- In the eyes of most church members, congregated religion is more enduring than denominational religion. Yet the deep DNA in ATS schools is denominational religion.

Brief History of Task Force Meetings

- Many denominations and parishes are testing new avenues of preparation that have the potential of undercutting and destroying institutions that have been around for a long time (i.e., theological schools).
- A sense of urgency was repeatedly expressed about how rapidly the world is changing and how quickly both schools and denominations need to deal with new realities.
- One of the great strengths and roles of theological schools is to be the bearer of the tradition. However, critical questions needed to be asked: What from the past do we dare not leave behind? What is the treasure that one has in an institution that must be projected into the future? What are the things we thought were treasures that may have to be jettisoned?

The second meeting centered on a series of questions:

- If the theological school today is to be the theological and historical anchor in uncertain times, are these schools prepared to assume this role?
- Do seminaries have the capacity to hear prophetic witness rather than simply bear it?
- Schools have tended to listen to hierarchy or leadership in the church but be out of touch with the lived life in the community. Seminary faculty members are often no longer able to speak the language of the grass roots. Are seminaries able to keep in contact, listen, and renew their dexterity in the language of the parish?

As a result of this discussion, the task force identified the need for more input from parish pastors about what was happening in ministry today and how theological education was preparing candidates to undertake that ministry. The task force accepted the invitation of one of its members, Leith Anderson, pastor of Wooddale Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, to listen in on his pastors' discussion group talking about ministry today. For the first time, the task force used the "fishbowl" setting for this discussion. The pastors gathered around a table in the center of the room to carry on their conversation. Task force members sat silently in an outer circle, listening in on the discussion. This setting would be important in the rest of the study.

From that experience, some of the previous questions were underscored with new ones appearing:

- There is a lack of communication between seminaries and pastors. Academics seem to be talking to academics. We need a better way to connect the academy to the church.
- Most theological education was invented for an ecology that no longer exists.
- Leadership is key for the future of congregations and the church; yet the seminaries do not seem able to do that leadership training. That happens better in the parish setting.

For the first time, the concept of creative construction and creative deconstruction was raised. As one task force member commented: "I think we are in a time where creative deconstruction must take place. Some of these creative alternatives must move us past what at one time was a wonderful thing."

In the fourth meeting, the task force began to hone the use of the fishbowl discussion, this time inviting denominational judicatory staff members responsible for the placing of seminary graduates in pastoral settings. The previous discussion had been with pastors of larger churches. Information from smaller parishes was equally important to hear. Over and over again the split between seminary faculties and parish realities kept coming to the fore. As one person indicated, "In seminary, the Christian life is summarized as a life of the mind. Seminaries criticize the church for professionalization of the ministry. Pastoral ministry is being a generalist and the seminary often seems to have lost sight of this." Increasingly the task force began to question if faculties in ATS schools could do an adequate job of curriculum review without having practitioners participating in their discussions.

The first drafts of the ecology papers in this volume were presented in the second half of this meeting. With Weber's paper on U.S. seminaries and churches finished, the task force decided that a similar paper should be prepared about the Canadian ecology. Sandra Beardsall presented her paper, "The Church/Theological School Relationship in Canada."

The fifth and sixth meetings were used to consider how to share the task force's findings and how to initiate a long-term discussion between ATS and the member churches. During the fifth meeting, plans began for a major consultation in the fall of 2007 that would invite eighty to one hundred people from the schools. As discussion continued, however, task force members increasingly wanted to enable their discussion to be expanded throughout the ATS membership. As one member commented: "These conversations have been so evocative for us that we need to look for ways to extend the conversation to a broader community of schools." Plans for the major consultation were set aside in favor of inviting schools throughout ATS to take part in the discussion, using the fishbowl format as had been so useful for the task force. This would spread the discussion more broadly, and the results would help the task force to test whether what they were hearing would be found elsewhere.

The sixth task force meeting was delayed until March 2008 to allow for five regional meetings, with five local theological schools invited to attend each of them. The fishbowl format was used with each discussion group composed of successful pastors from the region. The meetings were held in St. Louis, Missouri; Columbus, Ohio; Decatur, Georgia; Pasadena, California; and Toronto, Ontario. In the second half of each regional meeting, theological school representatives were asked to consider how ATS and the Commission on Accrediting could assist them in dealing with some of the issues raised.

When the sixth and final task force meeting took place, members heard the reports/comments of regional meeting participants. The general consensus was that the regional meetings had achieved what had been hoped. The conversation had been broadened to include twenty-four schools that were invited to continue the discussion with their faculty, boards, and constituencies. In

addition, the results of the regional meetings clearly underscored the findings of the previous five task force meetings: the needs of ministry today are changing so rapidly that theological schools have to work much more closely with local practitioners to ensure that ministerial candidates are being prepared for modern parish needs. It was also clear that candidates needed to be prepared with the kind of flexibility that would enable them to adapt to the needs of the churches in the rapidly changing North American culture. Surrounding these concerns was a growing sense of urgency that these issues needed immediate attention, both from the schools and from ATS as a whole.

At the final session, task force members spent time drawing together their conclusions and recommendations that would be shared with the ATS membership at the 2008 Biennial Meeting in Atlanta. Those conclusions were presented in Daniel Aleshire's address, "Making Haste Slowly."

Faith Rohrbough, retired president of Lutheran Theological Seminary Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, served as project director for the Theological Schools and the Church project.

ENDNOTE

1. Although ATS currently has a board of directors, it was an executive board at the time the task force was appointed.

The Canadian Ecology

Peter Wyatt

Emmanuel College of Victoria University

In this summary of meeting discussions, the author describes the social, governmental, and geographical differences shared by Canadian theological schools as compared with their U.S. counterparts.

The Canadian context

The contexts in which Canadian and American theological educators work share many commonalities, arising not only from the nature of the task itself but also from an increasingly common cultural milieu related to popular entertainment and sport and to the continental economic continuum. Yet there remain significant cultural and religious differences that shape the context of theological education in Canada.

As noted in the article by Sandra Beardsall, a major difference between the Canadian and U.S. contexts is that of scale. With a relatively small population living in a vast land, Canadian institutions, including theological schools, tend to be smaller than those of the United States. As well, the continuing influence of the original French settlement of Quebec and Canada's long history as a British dominion have created a more European feel to Canadian institutions. The enduring challenge of making a bilingual and bicultural country work also has enabled Canada to develop a present-day, largely respectful ethos of remarkable diversity.

Politically, British (and other European) cultural patterns have made the understanding of the relationship between church and state less ideological than in the United States. In several Canadian provinces, theological schools historically federated with provincially chartered universities receive per capita grants from government. The justifying rationale for this arrangement is that ongoing university oversight should ensure that confessional relationships will not undercut unfettered scholarship and learning. Freestanding schools, of course, are not in a position to receive such funding.

Another telltale difference between the two contexts is that while the Southern Baptist Convention, a thoroughly conservative association, is the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, the United Church of Canada, a thoroughly liberal church, remains (despite its declining membership) the largest Protestant denomination in Canada. In addition, Roman Catholics have always constituted 50 per cent of the Christian population in Canada. These two demographic factors may have a role in explaining why Canadian culture is generally more liberal and pragmatic than American and open to adopting "socialist" policies such as universal health insurance and care.

A less ideological and more pragmatic context also may make for more open relationships ecumenically. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, for instance, is a full member of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC); and several Protestant bodies, like the Christian Reformed Churches and the Salvation Army, are members of both the Canadian Council and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC). Indeed, there is periodic collaboration between the CCC and the EFC, as in the case of the official celebration marking the second millennium of Christianity ("Jesus 2000"). Such mainline-evangelical collaboration can be reflected among theological schools as well. For example, an event jointly planned by Emmanuel College (United Church) and Tyndale Seminary (evangelical) brought Pentecostal and other evangelical Native leaders into dialogue with United Church and Anglican Native leaders about the impact of historical mission approaches to the indigenous peoples of Canada.

Generally speaking, Canadian theological schools, including those federated with public universities, have always been oriented to serving the church, or, to put it better, to serving God in collaboration with the church. While there are schools federated with public universities, Canada has no true equivalent of the university divinity school. Federated schools may be open to students of any or no religious conviction, but the schools are all denominationally related. Canadian ATS member schools federated with universities usually are called "theological colleges," institutionally located midway between a university divinity school and a seminary. Often the chief academic officer and chief executive officer are one and the same—a "principal," frequently mandated with the responsibilities of both a president and a dean.

If the slavery of Africans is the "original sin" of the United States, then historic mission practice toward Aborigines has the equivalent role in Canada. In the last two decades, lawsuits regarding abuse in Indian Residential Schools has commandeered much institutional energy on the part of the historic mission churches. The Anglican General Synod was months from bankruptcy when a comprehensive deal was struck with the federal government (usually the other defendant in civil suits). One Anglican diocese did go bankrupt, and several Roman Catholic orders have been forced to sell off property to pay heavy judgments. Some theological schools (like Emmanuel College in Toronto) now include courses on traditional Aboriginal spirituality in revised curricula.

Current responses to changed ecology

Changed ecology of relationship with culture

The setting of many theological schools in Canada within public universities means that these schools feel acutely the simultaneous pressure of serving the needs of the church and of conforming to standards of the public academy. This is a stretching exercise, especially for faculty members who are called to do much more than university colleagues with regard to formation and community life and yet are increasingly being held accountable to university standards related to initial appointment, tenure review, and promotion. Also, freestanding seminaries, conscious of the need for universally acknowledged

credentials, are expecting significant published research from their faculties. At the end of the day, greater academic accountability may well serve the need of the church for intelligent and passionate leadership. In the meantime, though, faculty members feel the stretch, and this stretch is being examined by several faculties.

Interestingly, some of the university-federated schools have strong confessional orientations, including, for example, a credal statement affirming the substitutionary atonement, and yet receive government funding. While, according to government and university standards, these schools could not require subscription to their confessional statement by students, all would know their creedal convictions.

The rise of feminist consciousness and the tendency toward later vocations has meant that family plays a more important role in the placement process of new graduates. For example, each year several ordination-stream graduates from United Church schools cannot be settled in pastoral appointments because of “geographic limiting conditions” (i.e., for family or health reasons they cannot move to the more remote areas where the church needs them to serve). As well, a preponderance of part-time and married students means that in several mainline schools the residential character of study has almost faded away with a resulting loss in implicit communal formation.

One observation made by faculty about our “post” world and the impact of muscular secularism is that it feels like an exercise in ongoing liminality to be a theological teacher.

Changed ecology of relationship with church: The response we know already

The relationship with the church has changed, and continues to change, for several reasons. One is financial. While theological schools face critical financial challenges, the churches to which they are related may face more severe financial challenges. “We have to make it on our own.”

Another factor is the altered relationship of the churches, particularly the historic churches, to Canadian society. A growing secular spirit (especially in urban areas) means that mainline churches (usually without strategic goals for evangelism) continue to decline in terms of membership numbers. While there are many vital mainline congregations throughout the country, there are many more whose viability is being tested. In rural areas where mainline churches have an historic presence, depopulation accentuates the viability challenge. Where viability is in doubt, anxiety abounds for serving ministers and lay leaders. In the case of ministers, there is also a dynamic of shame—shame that decline is occurring on their watch. In this situation, judicatory officers and congregational lay leaders may become querulous, asking why schools are not sending them more effective leaders.

MDiv registration generally is down, a sign of diminishing numbers of candidates for ordered ministry. Schools have expanded their programs to capture other vocational interests, since “no school can make it on the MDiv alone.” Indeed, among the mainline churches there is a strong perception that there are too many campus-based programs for the actual number of ordination candidates.

In order to build enrolment, several schools (mainline and evangelical) have focused on establishing relationships with specific ethnic groups or with denominations that do not have a Canadian graduate theological school. At least one historic mainline school (Knox College, Toronto) now has a student body that is nearly 50 per cent ethnically Korean. One of the reasons for the current strength of enrolment at (evangelical) Tyndale Seminary is the strategic decision made decades ago to build a specific program for Chinese ministry and to welcome Pentecostal students.

Ironically, just when mainline vocations are down, there is a huge bulge of ordered ministers approaching the normal age of retirement. Already several mainline churches, unable to supply ministry personnel to scores of vacant pastoral charges, have created optional paths to ordination. These are characterized by combining concurrent pastoral appointments with short periods of intensive campus exposure (usually in the summer) and distance education through the rest of the year. "Lay pastoral ministers" with only six weeks of formal study are also exercising pastoral office (including sacramental licence) in some denominations. These two dynamics may be affecting numbers registering at theological schools. More important, such pragmatic solutions to a shortage of pastors may affect the long-term quality of church life and faith confession in the world. One participant observed that while new minimalist programs may make the theological college or seminary look like a "luxury model," the church cannot do without the disciplined learning and teaching of credentialed professors, "the tenured eggheads."

Roman Catholics, of course, have been depending on trained laity to assist in maintaining parish life in remoter areas of the country. In urban areas, another strategy in the face of an insufficient number of priestly candidates is the appointment of foreign-born and foreign-educated clergy. On the one hand, this is entirely appropriate given the ethnic diversity served by many urban parishes. On the other hand, these clergy often import local customs that produce confusion and even embarrassment among their Canadian-socialized parishioners.

Roman Catholic educators point to the importance of having a bishop with a strong academic background since this will affect the degree of episcopal support for the school.

Both mainline Protestants and Catholics reflect on the way in which the mentoring of younger ministers and priests by more seasoned ones is disappearing. Newly ordained priests, for instance, used to be placed in parishes under a senior pastor for several years. Frequently, now, they are immediately appointed to solo ministries in parishes with large memberships. The shortage of mainline ministers short-circuits apprenticeships. Whereas many ministers have had a career history of successively more responsible appointments (rural to small towns to midsize congregations), now they may be thrust into major responsibilities too soon. How can schools adequately prepare graduates for this challenge?

Many schools are learning to "listen to the church" by involving judicatory committees and congregational leaders in the discovery stage of curriculum revision. Given this demonstrated willingness to listen and the ATS emphasis on outcomes assessment in its standards, actual curriculum revision reflects

greater focus on the pastoral arts, including leadership capacity in the areas of spirituality and conflict management.

New departures: First attempt at additional models

Participants in the Toronto discussion were invited to contribute examples of first attempts at new or additional models; their reflections tended to do this implicitly rather than explicitly.

It was observed that one new dynamic pushing us toward change is the appearance of numbers of younger students. Among other things, younger students tend to be very focused on doing only what is required of them academically. They also tend to want the most up-to-date technology and cutting-edge strategies for ministry. "Our best strategy in response is to find precedents in the tradition for moving forward."

As noted, revisions of curricula are taking place to meet the needs of congregations. But attempts also to build more pedagogical integrity into curricula (e.g., with a nonnegotiable foundation year, including assessment of vocational aptitude) are compromised by the needs of part-time and commuter students.

Nondenominational seminaries always have had to work intentionally on relationships with congregations—otherwise they would disappear. The lack of ongoing denominational support has spurred a more entrepreneurial spirit in these schools, including with regard to academic programs. The enrolment (and financial) success of schools like Tyndale in Toronto and Regent in Vancouver is due in part to an entrepreneurial style and also to the reputation gained by their graduates in the churches. "People look to their peers of significance." In the past, denominational schools have been insulated from the imperative to flourish or perish based on the nurture of fruitful relationships, but now they must learn to build them afresh with congregations.

We live in a complicated web of relationships in which administrators are constantly negotiating those relationships—including relationships with donors. Deans and principals, once "principal faculty members," now frequently have to lay aside scholarly aspirations. Like pastors, school administrators face increasingly demanding administrative challenges. How can this reality be understood as a ministry and actually prove fruitful for the life of the body?

Some participants in Canadian discussions observed that the weight of serving institutional needs (congregational governance, judicatory responsibilities, lawsuits, etc.) functions as a dissuasive to those we might want to recruit for theological study and ordained ministry. Church life tends to "grind people down."

Several schools have history with a "pastor in residence." Is this a key approach in achieving greater integration in theological study aimed at pastoral ministry?

Three mainline denominations have established programs ("Starting Well," "Fresh Start") to support new graduates in their first few years of ordained ministry.

In a past paradigm, active forms of recruitment were not necessary. Today, certainly in the mainline context, recruitment is a major responsibility of the

school—with or without collaboration from national and regional judiciaries. The task is important not only because the church has a critical need of more ordained ministers than are in view but also because there is a need for enhanced quality. In the Toronto fishbowl discussion it was observed that congregations stress qualities of character when they go looking for new pastors. Such qualities usually come as part of the “raw material” coming in the door of the college or seminary. This makes recruiting the right kind of candidate vitally important for both seminary and church.

Commonalities

When asked to identify the common challenges and realities confronting all seminaries and denominations, the Toronto region discussion identified the following:

- More significant than denominational differences is the fact that we are all vulnerable to market forces.
- As an administrator, one is making decisions all the time about what is core and what is ancillary.
- Being female requires ongoing work of translation as female leaders continually have to deconstruct (male) dominant cultural constructs. There are implicit cultural understandings in which males feel instinctively comfortable. If women do not perceive these, “they will come back to bite them.”

Peter Wyatt is the immediate past principal of Emmanuel College of Victoria University in Toronto, Ontario.

The Ecology of Evangelical Seminaries

Ron Benefiel

Nazarene Theological Seminary

Task force members discuss ecological challenges for evangelical seminaries, including distance education, lack of denominational loyalty, and increased competition from nonseminary entities. They assert, however, that churches need the seminary just as much as seminaries need the church and that both can benefit the other when the two enter into long-term commitments with local congregations.

The Association of Theological Schools convened the Theological Schools and the Church project in 2005 for the purpose of exploring the relationship between theological schools and their sponsoring denominations. Over the course of the project, the discussion expanded to include the future of theological education, taking into account the particular contexts each of the members of the task force represented. The task force included presidents and consultants from Roman Catholic, mainline, and evangelical traditions in the United States as well as presidents from Canada. In this section, we will discuss the ecology of theological education (or the relationship between seminaries and the larger environment) and examine possibilities for the future from the vantage point of those in the evangelical tradition.

Cultural context

As Stephen Carter pointed out several years ago in *Culture of Disbelief*, the separation of church and state in the United States has operated in such a way as to relegate religion to the private domain and marginalize its influence. This was especially true for evangelicals through most of the twentieth century. In more recent years, the alignment of evangelicals with conservative politics brought them into the cultural spotlight and into the halls of power. But for many, the tradeoff was the undermining of the clarity of the evangelical movement's mission and the co-opting of its resources by competing political interests. Whether marginalized or aligned with political power, the relationship between evangelical movements and the dominant culture remains a key variable in understanding evangelicalism in America and the role of evangelical seminaries in the preparation of people for pastoral ministry.

When evangelicals occupied primarily the margins, their denominational relationships provided something of a "sectarian shield" protecting them from the influences of the dominant, secular society. But as evangelical members were impacted by the upwardly mobile forces of "redemption and lift" further nurtured by the educational opportunities provided by small evangelical Christian colleges, denominational shields were less effective. When evangelicals were numbered primarily among the working poor, they had much less of a stake in society and cared less about what society thought than was typi-

cally the case when they moved up the social ladder into the middle class. The world was more expansive from the vantage point of middle class America. Relations with others outside the sectarian tradition and even beyond the extended Christian family became increasingly important. Saving people from a “decadent” society gave way, in part, to using new found power to control, change, or at least influence the culture. Denominational identity and loyalty began to erode in favor of broad-based evangelical and cultural alliances. At the same time, other influences in the dominant society (e.g., post-Watergate) introduced elements of suspicion and skepticism with regard to established institutions, including denominational structures. A new localism further enhanced the development of local independent churches that symbolized freedom from control of distant headquarters and alien authority. These and other factors have contributed to an increase in a postdenominational independent church mindset in the evangelical world.

Denominations have declined as the primary way of organizing North American religious life. In many circles, brand-name loyalty has given way to “switching,” by which people choose churches for reasons other than their denominational connections. Nondenominational, independent, and denominational congregations that never mention their pedigree are all on the rise.

In the meantime, the church growth movement and the accompanying models idealizing the super church may have reached their zenith and begun to decline. While the evangelical movement remains very strong in the United States (especially compared to most other religious groups), there is considerable uncertainty about where evangelicalism is heading in the future. The next generation of evangelical leaders is less convinced that church growth models are appropriate either to Scripture or to the context. Conversations among postmodern millennials frequently voice critiques of most expressions of American Christianity, but most notably, critiques of the megachurch. One task force member asks, “Is there the possibility that the enormous evangelical expansion has peaked and so may have the megachurch movement?” While conversations about the missional church, the emerging church, and the organic church offer possible glimpses of the evangelical future, that future still appears sketchy at best.

Ecological challenges for evangelical seminaries

There are numerous critical implications of this ecology for evangelical seminaries, especially those that are denominationally related. The general trend of decreasing denominational identity and loyalty impacts everything from student recruitment to institutional development. Prospective students whose denominational/theological dispositions are more open and flexible may be more likely to consider studying in schools that offer greater prestige, lower tuition, or proximity to home regardless of the theological orientation of the schools. As a result, many denominational seminaries are finding it more difficult to recruit students from their denominational/theological traditions, especially those who live at a distance.

The challenges related to student recruitment are not limited to decreases in denominational identity and loyalty. The makeup of prospective and entering students appears to be changing in ways that make recruitment of new students more difficult. In the overall student demographic, some evangelical seminaries are reporting increases in women students pursuing Master of Divinity degrees. However, women students in evangelical seminaries are typically justified in their relative uncertainty about the possibilities of placement, contributing to a certain ambivalence about seminary education. Additional demographic changes indicate the influence of “extended adolescence” and less clarity about life directions or “calling” for many prospective students in their twenties and early thirties. There is some indication that students are less prepared academically, less willing to give the time and effort necessary to complete degrees, and less aware of ministry as vocation. In addition, the maturation of seminaries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa are making it possible for more students to receive quality theological education in those contexts, students who might have in the past come to the United States to receive an education.

Perhaps the most significant challenge related to student recruitment is the highly competitive environment in which evangelical seminaries in the United States exist. Seminaries are not only in competition with one another but also with alternative modalities of ministerial preparation.

There is a common feeling that the landscape of theological education has shifted. The view of the ministry and how people become ministers is changing. Competition from nonseminary sources weighs heavily on everyone’s table. In many circles, theological schools at one time cornered the market on training ministers. But that is no longer the case, thanks to the Internet, the rise of “virtual seminaries” and online courses, and the proliferation of popular conferences, workshops, and the like, often under the auspices of so-called teaching churches. Choices abound, and increasing numbers of leaders no longer look to theological schools as their primary source for the latest information on best practices, new ministry models, or developing strategic plans for reaching the culture.

Regardless of one’s particular denominational framework, an increasing number of pathways can lead to certification as a minister. What that does for theological schools is force them to realize they are not the only “store on the block.”

The primary competing alternative modalities for evangelical ministerial preparation are online and/or megachurch-based programs. While an increasing number of accredited seminaries are offering online courses, there is significant competition from non-ATS accredited schools offering entire programs online. The debate about whether residential or online courses provide better overall preparation for ministry continues unabated, with increased attention being given to hybrid courses that offer both classroom and online instruction.

Megachurches with the vision and resources to offer ministerial preparation programs in their local contexts are providing additional competition for students. Megachurches tend to do in-house training as they raise up leaders from within that they do not want to lose, even for a time. For part-time stu-

dents already connected to a church who don't want to relocate for a seminary education, they will consider other options for education locally.

In many seminaries, the Master of Divinity degree is declining in popularity, with an increasing number of students opting for Master of Arts degrees. This may be a combination of student preference and an increased willingness of denominations and local congregations to accept the MA as adequate preparation for ministry. At the same time, a general decrease in average student course loads is being reported. A combination of increasing tuition, increasing numbers of single students (who are more likely to find it necessary to work full time), and a perceived decrease in urgency to complete degrees may be some of the contributing variables. For many seminaries, the increased challenges related to recruitment, the movement toward MA degrees, and the decrease in average course loads puts pressure on both the total headcount and FTE. This, of course, negatively impacts tuition revenue and contributes to financial pressures on seminaries.

If evangelical seminaries have often experienced financial challenges in the past, the current ecology plus the increased costs related to education in general (health care, information technology, etc.) place seminaries under even more financial pressure. One task force member notes, "The economic factor is huge in this picture." Evangelical seminaries have relatively small endowments, making them more susceptible to environmental factors and necessarily more amenable to donors' interests. Other factors adding to financial pressures include increased pressures on denominational budgets, which have made it more difficult for denominations to continue funding seminaries. Competition with parachurch organizations is especially acute in the evangelical community. It is apparent that most seminaries cannot continue business as usual in this environment. It will be necessary for most of them to find new ways to fund and deliver theological education if they are to continue to effectively carry out their missions.

The way forward

Far from being discouraged by the significant challenges facing evangelical seminaries in this ecology, the members of the task force from evangelical traditions were both resourceful in their creative ideas and optimistic about the future. Most of the task force's creative ideas may be grouped into two broad categories: offering multiple modes of educational delivery systems and working more closely in partnership with local congregations.

The general sense of direction between the seminary and the local church is no longer simply a matter of inviting students to the seminary campus; it also includes taking the seminary to the student through multiple modes of educational delivery systems. The challenge, as one seminary president stated it, is to make theological education "available, accessible, and flexible."

The new mode of theological education gaining the most attention these days, of course, is distance education through online courses. While the majority view remains that online education will not likely replace residential theological education, it is also understood to be an important resource with

regard to both accessibility and pedagogy. It may be especially useful when offered in conjunction with other modes of education. Theological education in the future will become more of a hybrid of residential programs, adult degree completion programs, online programs, and coaching-mentoring programs.

Perhaps the single most important movement emphasized by members of the task force was the need for seminaries to work more closely with the local church. The seminary needs the local church. In this rapidly changing environment, seminaries can easily become detached from ministry at the local church level. They may take on a life of their own separate from the day-to-day realities of parish ministry. It has become axiomatic that professors who have not served as pastors in the past five or ten years may have little knowledge about what it means to pastor in the current context. They may, in fact, be teaching students how to minister in a world that no longer exists. Yet the reflexes of evangelical theological educators are not as responsive to their environments as they need to be. Theological educators are more tied to the guilds and disciplines than to understanding how the churches are changing in the United States. In order to be effective in preparing people for ministry in complex, diverse, fluid social settings, seminary professors and administrators must listen closely to pastors and lay leaders. Seminary professors and administrators continually need to learn about the realities of day-to-day parish ministry in the local congregation.

It should also be said (hopefully without being presumptuous), that the church needs the seminary. The opportunity for students to prepare for ministry in a community of theological wisdom made up of people with expertise in theological, biblical, historical, missional, pastoral, psychological, and sociological disciplines is nearly impossible to duplicate in most local congregations. Further, seminaries have the responsibility of preparing students for ministry in many contexts, not just in a single context. Local church ministry training models may be relatively effective in preparing people for ministry in that particular context but less effective in preparing people for ministry in other settings. The breadth of education necessary to be adequately prepared to minister in multiple contexts calls on the need for communities of theological wisdom with a broad base of experience and expertise.

The church also needs the seminary to keep it theologically grounded (or centered) in a rapidly changing environment. Local churches are in a very competitive environment. In order to survive, they must compete for the time, energy, and financial support of parishioners. The competition they face is not only with other congregations but also with an increasing number of entertainment options and worthy causes. In this competitive environment, parishioners can easily become consumers of church services. The local church may find itself trying to compete by offering "more for less," hardly a recipe for Christian discipleship! In some cases, local congregations may find that in an effort to be relevant (and thus competitive), they are accommodating themselves to the dominant culture in such a way that they reflect the culture more than the Kingdom of God. The church needs the seminary to be a community of theological, biblical, and missional discourse with and for the church. At its best, the seminary serves as a theological compass to help the church navigate stormy seas and keep it on course in uncharted waters.

The point is that the seminary and the local church need each other in the work of preparing people for faithful and effective ministry in today's world. For seminaries, this will mean listening closely to pastors and lay leaders and inviting experienced pastors into the seminary community and on to the seminary faculty. We have to aggressively listen to grass roots leaders not only for building relationships for funding purposes but also for the welfare of our curricular efforts to produce quality leaders for the church. In taking the local context seriously, seminaries must continue to engage it. One way this may be accomplished is through the formation of advisory boards in which effective pastors are invited as "clinical pastors" in regular conversation with faculty.

Further, the necessity of understanding the local context of ministry may also impact priorities in the hiring of faculty. We must hire faculty based on a "both and" value. Regardless of discipline, faculty need to have significant local church or missionary experience in addition to the "union card" from their academic guild. This affects the kind of people we are looking for as positions come open at our seminaries. This is crucial to our future and to the language of understanding. This moves us more toward mentoring and coaching.

But partnering with local congregations is much more than inviting people into the seminary; it will necessitate the seminary moving into the context of the local church. Partnering with local congregations effectively utilizes churches as centers of learning. Partnering also provides additional teaching venues that have the advantage of preparing students for ministry in the context of a local congregation. Extension sites or campuses are certainly nothing new in theological education, but as seminaries learn to partner more effectively with local congregations, extension sites may become increasingly prevalent and important.

The movement of the seminary to the local church context will likely mean partnering in numerous contexts with long-term commitments. Working closely with local congregations means that seminaries will partner with local church pastors as mentors and local congregations as "teaching churches" in the preparation of students for ministry. These partnerships may take on different forms, including:

- courses offered in local churches to take advantage of the context for learning;
- partnerships with teaching churches to provide church-based degree programs with core courses taught at the seminary and practical/pastoral ministry courses taught to "intern/apprentices" in the local church;
- programs incorporating two years at the seminary, one year off campus in a church internship, and a final year back on the seminary campus (the "Lutheran model"); and/or
- mentor programs with teams of mentors—a faculty member, pastor, and layperson for each student—that help students set realistic goals for each term and provide support and accountability (the "Denver model").

The problem inherent in these partnerships is that of students relocating. One plan is to multiply (teaching) locations so that people can stay in their ministries and the seminary can avoid being captured by one church. It has also been suggested that a serious partnership requires some sort of contract.

Conclusion

Currently, there are significant challenges for evangelical seminaries in their denominational and social ecologies. The challenges are mostly related to factors that generally are beyond their control. New competing modes and centers of ministerial education, declining denominational identity/loyalty, declining average student course loads, declining denominational support, and increased costs of education combine in such a way as to put many seminaries under financial pressure. In order to effectively provide theological education to prospective students, seminaries will increasingly need to use multiple educational delivery modes, including online and hybrid courses as well as courses offered in a variety of extension venues.

The church needs the seminary. It needs the seminary to prepare ministers for service to Christ and the church, but the church also needs seminaries to serve as communities of theological wisdom with and for the church in unstable times and uncertain environments. If it is true that the church needs the seminary, it is equally true that the seminary needs the church. The seminary not only needs support from the church, it is increasingly apparent that the seminary also needs to partner with the local church to be effective in its work of preparing people for pastoral ministry. In the current ecology, the seminary will do its best work when it partners with local congregations.

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The Turbulent Ecology of Mainline Protestantism

James Wind
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Changes in American culture and society altered the religious landscape for mainline Protestantism. Immigration, urbanization, and higher education challenged classic cradle-to-grave Protestant belonging patterns along with increasing demands on personal life, time, and finances. Mainline denominations contributed to ecological change as they undertook social issues of the day and considered new understandings of the Bible, traditions, and missions of the institutions to which they belonged. Despite the uncertainty of what the author calls "the turbulent ecology," Wind says mainline denominations are finding new ways of dealing with the turbulence and staying focused on handing over the best of their heritages to a new generation.

Few descriptors of American Protestantism have required as much throat clearing and qualification as the phrase *mainline Protestantism*. The phrase became popular roughly a half century ago and is itself a sign of an American religious ecology in turmoil. In 1976 Martin E. Marty attempted to provide a new map of the changing religious landscape in his book, *A Nation of Behavers*. The first group he turned to was the mainline. The word was still new enough as a label that "no scholarly attempts had yet been made to trace its rise to prevalence." Underscoring both the novelty of the term and its lack of precision, Marty suggested that until the '70s, "Mainline religion had meant simply white Protestant."¹

Twenty years later, Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks summarized a massive, decade-long case study of one of the mainline's leading denominations, the Presbyterian Church (USA). In *Vital Signs: The Promise of Mainstream Protestantism*, they reflected on their preferred adjective *mainstream*, which was a "verbal cousin" to descriptors like *mainline*, *liberal*, and *establishment*. They mentioned several ways the term was used: (1) as an identifier of a particular group of eight denominations (American Baptist Church, the Christian Church [Disciples of Christ], the Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church [USA], the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church); (2) as a way of describing a group of denominations deeply involved in "conciliar Protestantism" as manifested in the National Council of Churches and various ecumenical dialogues and causes; (3) as a religious group that "exercised a dominant influence on American culture"; (4) as a label for a particular shared theological perspective within the larger world of American Protestantism; and (5) as a name for a group of "troubled denominations."²

Of all those uses, it is the last one that provides the most direct link to the ecological changes that have been reshaping the mainline in particular and American religion in general. The eight denominations singled out in *Vital Signs* were “afflicted by membership decline, institutional malaise, internal conflict, and theological confusion” so severe that more than a few observers of American religious life were tempted to replace words like mainline and mainstream with adjectives like “old line” and “sideline.”³ During the past half century, powerful changes taking place within these denominations and in the larger culture had altered both the cultural perceptions and the denominational self-understandings of the potency and role of this segment of American religious life.

What were some of the most important changes? An enormous scholarly and popular literature stands ready to offer a long list of answers and explanations. In the space available here we can mention only some of the most important turbulence generators. Some of the key sources of turbulence were the powerful (and familiar) dynamics of modernity that reshaped the social and cultural realities of the nation. A nation that in its formative years had celebrated its open frontiers, family farms, and small villages became increasingly metropolitan. A succession of waves of immigrants, some larger, some smaller, but all bringing different kinds of newcomers into the American experiment, enriched the nation’s pluralism with new languages, faith traditions, customs, and values and provided the work force that fueled its industrial and economic growth. As the cities grew and the immigrants kept coming, Protestantism’s place in the culture began to change.⁴ By the beginning of the twentieth century, Roman Catholicism passed by all the distinct Protestant faith communities to become the single largest denomination in the United States.⁵ Protestant steeples may once have dominated village greens, but at the dawn of the new millennium, taller corporate headquarters and a dizzying array of religious congregations crowded the horizon. The Protestant traditions that had settled the original colonies found themselves constantly adapting to the changing landscape—starting out with the intention of being the only show in town, then becoming mainline pillars of a larger community, and finally learning how to be one religious option among many.⁶

The people within the mainline Protestant denominations continued to experience other kinds of ecological shifts that reshaped their relationships to their religious institutions. Higher education opened wider and more diverse pathways of learning, vocation, and opportunity. As new careers and professions beckoned, as modern transportation made mobility a pervasive American experience, and as the market economy spread out a wider array of work opportunities and lifestyle choices, classic cradle-to-grave Protestant belonging patterns changed. Belonging to a congregation had to compete for space on the calendar with demanding jobs (increasingly two per family), school schedules and after-school activities for children, a smorgasbord of leisure options, and an entertainment and media juggernaut that invaded every corner of life. Precious resources of time, money, attention, commitment, and energy had to be spread ever more thinly. Repeatedly, those who studied and reflected on American life noted that the net effect of these and other major social changes were weaken-

ing relational ties (within families, within ethnic and religious communities, and between individuals and institutions) and increasing individualism.⁷

Cutting across or swirling within these major ecological shifts were an increasing series of polarizing value confrontations that simultaneously divided existing communities and brought special interest groups to life. At the very cultural moment when the mainline became self-conscious of its shifting leadership role in the culture, the great crises of the '60s and '70s erupted: the Vietnam War, the civil rights struggle, the sexual revolution, feminism, the right to life movement, and Watergate were just a few of the earthquakes that altered the religious landscape. Momentous when they erupted in the middle of the twentieth century, each of these upheavals has set off aftershocks and created the conditions for greater tremors that continue to roil the culture in 2008. The institutions of mainline Protestantism, its congregations, seminaries, and denominations became different kinds of places—fewer members, more controversy, diminished funding sources, loss of momentum—as a result.

It is easy to tell the story of America's changing religious ecology as if mainline Protestantism were a victim of forces beyond its control. That would be misleading. Many of the driving forces of modernity—higher education, for example—were powerfully shaped and led by mainline Protestants.⁸ Many of the controversies that divided our culture were also shaped and led by representatives from the mainline. In addition, the mainline was making a set of theological commitments that contributed to the ecological turbulence. As America plunged more deeply into values confusion, the mainline welcomed the insights of scientific and historical study into the debate about what the Bible says or means. Its denominations individually and collectively felt a special calling to grapple with the great social issues of the day and did so in a variety of national movements such as the Nestle boycott, the Sanctuary Movement, and Jubilee 2000. Mainline congregations followed the same impulses at the local level, housing and sponsoring a disproportionately large share of the nation's civic organizations, self-help groups, and community agencies.⁹

The mainline worked on so many issues and in so many ways, that the true size of its public agenda is difficult to discern. In 2002 Robert Wuthnow led a team of scholars that published the results of a Pew Charitable Trusts study of the public role of mainline Protestantism. Among the social issues that preoccupied the mainline were: racism and civil rights, welfare for children and families, corporate and citizen responsibility for investments in apartheid South Africa, nuclear weapons, Vietnam, the role of the United States in Central America, the Gulf Wars, abortion rights, feminism, sexual freedom, gay and lesbian issues, nuclear energy, clean air and water, acid rain, ozone depletion, biodiversity, eco-justice, prayer in public schools, school vouchers, public funds for parochial schools, government spies in sanctuary churches, and the shifting line of separation between church and state.¹⁰ As they pursued this enormous public agenda, the mainline churches also sought to develop an ecumenical consensus (in the United States and abroad) that transcended many particular denominational traditions in the quest for a common understanding of the faith and order of the Christian church.

In many ways it is still too early to assess the impact of these twentieth-century efforts. For some, the rapprochements achieved between Christianity and modern knowledge or the advances that have come in dealing with institutionalized racism or against certain pandemics like HIV-AIDS are already seen as great contributions. Others have a very different reading. Either way, the work of the mainline denominations changed the larger ecology. It also had unintended consequences. As the mainline sought to express a new kind of public ecumenical consensus, it also posed new challenges to its own members and institutions. At the same time that the culture raised new questions and stretched old relational patterns, the mainline denominations were asking members of its churches to revise their understandings of the Bible, their traditions, and the mission of the institutions to which they belonged.

Given even this sketchy description of the turbulent ecology that mainline Protestantism lives within—and that it had helped create—how is it faring today? The eight denominations are still here and they remain “troubled” in a variety of ways. The turmoil in our culture grows as the United States keeps working the old culture wars issues while it seems to lurch from crises overseas to the largest economic crisis in recent memory.

The 2008 *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* released by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life provides a fresh angle of vision on the American ecology. According to its research, 78.4 percent of Americans still identify themselves as Christian, this despite the growth of new religions and many alarms about America’s growing secularism. For those interested in “tipping points,” 51.3 percent of American adults identify themselves as some sort of Protestant—is this the last time that statistics will point to a Protestant majority in the United States? That percentage has declined from the 60–65 percent level reported in surveys taken during the ’70s and ’80s. Within Protestantism, the Pew researchers include three clusters of members: evangelicals (26.3 percent of the adult population); mainline (18.1 percent), and historically black (6.9 percent). The study also reports on a tremendous amount of denominational switching and churning of members. Unlike the Protestants, Roman Catholics seem to be relatively stable in terms of their overall percentage of population (23.9 percent). But, within that superficial stability is another story. Fully 10 percent of Americans now identify themselves as former Catholics (the largest membership loss of any American faith group). The Catholic Church holds its own statistically because of the influx of new immigrant members who make up for the back door losses. Equally interesting is the growth of those who express their religious identities as “nothing in particular.”¹¹

So, mainline Protestantism makes up a significant but not numerically dominant portion of the national ecology. Its membership is aging and it is struggling to attract younger members. It has significant assets to offer the culture: millions of members, thousands of congregations, tens of thousands of clergy, billions of dollars in foundations and pension funds, and a theological tradition that still impels people to love God and neighbor. It continues to express itself on the great social issues and to feel a special responsibility for the public life of this country and for the health of the global community.

In recent years a growing number of efforts to renew and revitalize the mainline have also taken place—responses to the toll taken by the turbulent ecology and efforts to retrieve the “always reforming” core of its Protestant tradition. These efforts range from the attempts by individual congregations to develop new forms of the catechumenate to transformation of congregational meetings from times to “do business” to occasions of spiritual formation. Mainline seminaries are reshaping their curricula in order to build stronger connections between the academic study of theology, the spiritual formation of seminarians, and teaching the practical leadership skills required in congregations that carry within them all of America’s turbulence.¹² Denominations and foundations are creating new peer learning groups for entering and practicing clergy to provide both the support and the learning environments required to help them—and their congregations—thrive and change.¹³ National and regional denominational leaders are experimenting with new ways to support their congregations and build new relationships among them. Groups of pastors and theologians are seeking to learn new ways to “re-tradition” the mainline by retrieving key practices from the church’s rich heritage and putting them to work in new ways.¹⁴ There are hundreds, if not thousands, of such efforts taking place across the mainline, most of them below the radar screen of even the most astute observers. They are efforts to reconstruct the mainline, to build new patterns of relationship and connection to fill the void left by the loss of so many old patterns.

The future shape of mainline Protestantism is an open and urgent question. What will come of all the local efforts currently taking place remains to be seen. But it seems clear that the ecology that surrounds and permeates the mainline will continue to create great turbulence. It also seems clear that many within the mainline are intent about handing the best of their heritage over to a new generation. That generation may even find a new name for the tradition it receives.

James Wind is president of The Alban Institute, which was founded in 1974 to support congregations and their leaders.

ENDNOTES

1. Martin E. Marty, *A Nation of Behavers* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 52–53.
2. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks, *Vital Signs: The Promise of Mainstream Protestantism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), xii–xiv.
3. Ibid.
4. Classic descriptions of these complex transitions can be found in Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972); Martin E. Marty, *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York, NY: The Dial Press, 1970) and *Pilgrims in Their Own Land: 500 Years of Religion in America* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1984).
5. Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life*, 2nd. ed. (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 2002), 121–184.

6. James P. Wind and James W. Lewis, eds., *American Congregations*, vols. 1 and 2 (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1994) explore the congregational dimensions of this changing landscape.
7. Two of the most influential descriptions of these powerful social changes are Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985) and Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
8. A case study of the leadership role in the rise of the modern American University is recounted in James P. Wind, *The Bible and the University: The Messianic Vision of William Rainey Harper* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987). A more comprehensive study of the relationship between mainline Protestantism and higher education is Conrad Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995).
9. Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).
10. Robert Wuthnow and John H. Evans, *The Quiet Hand of God: Faith-Based Activism and the Public Role of Mainline Protestantism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002).
11. *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey* (Washington, DC: Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2008), <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>.
12. See Charles R. Foster, Lisa E. Dahill, Lawrence A. Golemon, and Barbara Wang Tolentino, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006) for the most recent and most ambitious effort to examine how seminaries and divinity schools actually shape a pastoral imagination by mixing four distinct pedagogies: interpretation, formation, contextualization, and performance. This mixing takes place both through distinct curricular and campus life offerings that include immersion in classic academic disciplines, worship and spiritual formation practices, contextual immersions, and field work and other encounters with reflective practitioners. But *Educating Clergy* also gives many examples of the ways that individual teachers attempt to reach beyond their own areas of specialization to mix the pedagogies.
13. One of the most ambitious experiments has been the Transition into Ministry initiative supported by Lilly Endowment Inc. An early attempt to glean the implications of this experiment is James P. Wind and David J. Wood, *Becoming a Pastor: Reflections on the Transition Into Ministry* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2008).
14. Two leading examples of this retrieval effort are Dorothy C. Bass, ed., *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1997) and Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004).

The Seminaries and the Church: Analysis of an Ecology from the Roman Catholic Perspective

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The authors examine six aspects of ecclesial ecology from the Roman Catholic perspective. While funding for education of ordination candidates has not changed significantly, student demographics has, especially in the number of candidates for ordination, the cultural diversity of the student body, and the presence of women. Changes in perceptions of seminaries as well as changes in hierarchical polity, ministry educational requirements, and preparation for ministry beyond the parish also have greatly altered the ecology of the Roman Catholic landscape.

*E*colony may be defined as the relationship of organisms to their environment. There are at least two ways of understanding the church as an ecology. First, we could say that ecology describes the ways in which various elements of the church (leadership, institutions, membership, seminaries and other schools, ministers and ministry candidates) relate to one another within the wider ecclesial environment. Or we could say that ecology describes the way in which the church as a whole relates to the cultural environment in which it finds itself. Environmental factors that affect the church as a whole include cultural, political, and economic trends and events. Although this essay will focus on the ways in which the interaction between the church as a whole and one of its elements—seminaries—has changed, both of these views offer important insights.

We sometimes think of ecologies as “delicate.” This is meant to suggest that even the slightest change can upset the balance necessary for vitality. Although we might think that ecclesial ecology is the most delicate of all, we are not convinced this is true. We would like to suggest that if we believe in the Holy Spirit, then we must also believe that ecclesial ecology, especially as it pertains to ministry, is more robust than delicate. Even so, however, it can get out of balance, especially when various cultural or human factors come into play. History documents the many adaptations of the past. Sometimes these were truly graced responses to the guidance of the Spirit. Sometimes they led to an imbalance in the total system, when cultural or human limitations dominated the adaptation.

Similarities and differences in ecclesial ecologies

The churches that ATS represents are very diverse. From evangelical to Orthodox, from mainline Protestant to Roman Catholic, they have rich and varied theologies, histories, and polity. Still, they have many problems and issues in common. Task force conversations revealed several categories that were of concern to all churches and seminaries; yet in many instances, the details of dynamics of those challenges varied from one ecclesial setting to another. The following will highlight ways in which the Catholic ecology is similar to and differs from those in other denominations.

Finances and funding

One of the first big shifts in theological education has been a series of incremental changes in the way churches fund seminary education. This was first described by Anthony Ruger in 1994.¹ His point was that although it was happening in a variety of ways, most denominations were beginning to reduce funding to seminaries and that seminaries could not rely on a steady and generous flow of denominational funds as they had in the past. It is difficult to say what caused this shift. Was it a different view of the denomination's view of seminaries or the fact that seminaries had, for various reasons, enhanced their own fundraising efforts so that they were, or at least appeared to be, less in need of denominational funds? Whatever the case, this diminished funding also tended to remove seminaries further from the consciousness of congregations.

The only place this has not changed significantly is in Roman Catholicism, where the bishop still pays for virtually all educational expenses for priesthood candidates.² Nonetheless, ecclesial responsibility for funding of ministry candidates, ordained and lay, remains largely invisible to average Catholics.

Changing student demographics

All denominations except evangelicals report significant increases in the average age of students. Most also report large numbers of women candidates and growing numbers of nonwhite candidates. In Roman Catholicism, for example, the 2007–08 enrollment in theologates was 3,286—one half of what it was thirty years ago—and more than one third of priesthood candidates are 35 or older. In addition to these men preparing for ordination as priests, the Roman Catholic community has significant numbers of lay persons preparing for ecclesial ministry. More than two thirds are women and their average age is over 40. While 28 percent of the 18,000 laity preparing for ministry are pursuing a degree, only 4 percent of these are studying at a seminary.³

One area in which Catholicism stands alone, however, is in the number of candidates for ordination. With only 3,286 ordination candidates nationwide, Catholicism not only has the fewest of any major denomination but also the lowest ratio of candidates to congregants by far.⁴

Among seminarians there is growing racial and ethnic diversity. In 2007–08, 7 percent of the total ATS enrollment were from countries other than the United States.⁵ In Catholic schools, however, more than one fourth, representing eighty-one countries, were from outside the United States. In the Catholic

seminary population, six in ten were white, one in six Hispanic, 12 percent Asian, 5 percent Black, and 6 percent identified themselves as “other.” Among lay ministry students in all programs (seminary, diocesan, college, and university), two thirds were white and 28 percent Latino.⁶

This rapidly changing demographic situation has placed enormous strain on seminaries and faculties who can no longer rely on a consistent ecclesial, cultural, or educational background. In addition, faculty must often teach in more than one language or deal with problems that arise from the increasing prevalence of English as a foreign language. The large number of ministry candidates whose first language is not English impacts not only the classroom but also ministry itself. Catholics, for example, frequently complain that they have trouble understanding their new foreign-born priests, especially in preaching.

In addition to these differences in race and gender, there are also theological differences between men preparing for the priesthood and men and women preparing for lay ecclesial ministry. Recent research has shown that priesthood candidates are often more conservative in their views than lay people and sometimes do not support the expansion of lay ministry that has characterized the years since the Second Vatican Council. Often priesthood candidates have no prior experience in ministerial work in parishes, whereas many men and women seeking a ministry degree have significant experience over the course of many years. Finally, whereas the process for screening incoming candidates for priesthood is extensive and rigorous, selection and formation processes for lay women and men are evolving (and sometimes nonexistent). Collectively, these factors contribute to differences in viewpoints that are both an enrichment in the classroom and a challenge to faculty.⁷

Changing perceptions of seminaries

Some of the task force’s conversations suggested that average congregants are more distant from seminary formation issues and that seminaries are “not in the imagination” or “on the horizon of concern” for them. In Catholicism, this may be partly because there are fewer priesthood candidates and fewer young priests, so people don’t think about where they come from or what it takes to get them from initial vocational stirrings to active ministry.

In other situations, especially nondenominational megachurches, there is a feeling that seminaries have lost touch and are no longer able to teach ministry. One megachurch pastor told task force members that seminaries may have outlived their usefulness. Our schools might be useful, he said, for biblical languages and perhaps a couple of semesters of church history, but after that he felt that his congregation and staff could teach ministry candidates all they needed to know.

This puts seminaries in a double bind. On the one hand, they want to respond to the need for effective practical ministry and avoid uncritical appropriation of university standards of scholarship and teaching that might be inappropriate for ministry training. On the other hand, they also want to be intellectually respectable and prepare students who are “content experts” and who can think on their feet and act as resident theologians in their congregations.

Assignment and distribution of clergy

Perhaps the most obvious and distinctive difference in the Catholic ministerial ecology is its hierarchical polity. Although there have been some historical anomalies, for the most part bishops have been exclusively responsible for the selection, formation, and appointment of clergy. While this has at least a theoretical advantage of promoting doctrinal and ministerial uniformity, it has also created a kind of congregational passivity. Unlike their Protestant counterparts, Catholics have just sat back and waited for the bishop to appoint their next pastor. They would never have thought of trying to call their own clergy. As a result, they lack the “habitus” and the skills necessary for active involvement in the selection, formation, and ordering of ministers. Most parishioners have no idea where their clergy came from, how they were recruited, or how they were trained.

This has created enormous problems as parishes are now faced with rapid growth, fewer priests, and the need for large numbers of nonordained ministers who will in some cases serve as de-facto pastors where there is no resident priest.⁸ Many parish committees can't even write a decent job description let alone establish competitive compensation, professional development goals, job security, and effective performance evaluation.⁹ Although there have been some attempts by bishops to create standards for nonordained ministry, many hesitate to intervene because they fear that efforts to promote and standardize lay ministry will be interpreted as a capitulation to the priest shortage.

Our hierarchical polity also makes the kind of “freelance” ministry that is often seen in Protestant churches, especially evangelical, unheard of. One Protestant seminary president lamented that he had plenty of ministry candidates but that many of them did not want to take established congregations. “They all want to plant a new congregation,” he said.

Among ordained clergy in the Catholic community, this kind of entrepreneurial focus is not expected. Men are assigned to their ministry, usually in a parish. Perhaps this is one of the key factors that contributes to the much larger number of young male ministry candidates in evangelical churches. Perhaps they view ministry as an exciting, entrepreneurial adventure rather than merely franchise management.

However, there is a current of entrepreneurial enterprise in the Catholic community. A significant number of lay men and women who first served on parish staffs subsequently founded or moved to independent organizations, with varying degrees of connection to the official Church. In the field of youth ministry, for example, the Center for Ministry Development has been recognized for its leadership in providing training for both new and veteran church ministers for more than twenty-five years. The National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management has been serving as a link between business expertise and areas of need, such as the Archdiocese of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. In both cases, lay men and women work in partnership with official church entities but as independent, entrepreneurial ministers.

Changing norms for ministry education

Roman Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity, and mainline Christian denominations have required at least three years of full-time study for generations, or even centuries. (Today's Catholic curriculum is essentially the result of post-tridentine reforms in the seventeenth century.) In recent years, however, nearly all denominations have responded to the shortage of clergy, financial and logistical difficulties in access to residential programs, and the limitations of the traditional residential seminary program by experimenting with other options such as online programs. These new programs may be geared toward ordination or various kinds of unordained or "licensed" ministry.¹⁰

Nowhere, however, is the change more dramatic than in the Catholic Church. While two full years of philosophy and four years of theology are still the standard for priesthood candidates, in barely a generation we have opened ministry to lay students with a two-year degree that may not even include field education or spiritual formation.¹¹ Even more recently, we have seen the appearance of undergraduate programs in ministry and a wide variety of diocesan training programs that are often part time, taught by local diocesan personnel, and result in no academic credential. This lowering of standards and diversity of educational programs also affects the hiring process.¹²

We are not aware of any time at which the Catholic Church asked explicit questions about whether these shorter programs were adequate or whether there was good reason for reducing the preparation necessary for full-time ministry. Although the recent document of the United States bishops, *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*, offers a rich exploration of the optimum human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral preparation, the document is not binding on any hiring pastor, nor on any diocesan or other ministry formation programs.¹³

Ministry needs in nonparish settings

One important difference between the Catholic ministry scene and that in other denominations is that U.S. Catholicism has more nonparish ministerial obligations than all other denominations combined. It has thousands of elementary and secondary schools; hundreds of hospitals, colleges, and universities; and many large social service agencies. Although a few of these institutions were founded by dioceses and religious orders of men, the vast majority were founded and staffed by women religious. These institutions have had an enormous influence on Catholic life and identity. They have not only borne Catholic identity and culture from one generation to the next, they have also served as feeders and hothouses for vocations to priesthood and religious life.

From an ecological perspective, these institutions are starving for lack of nourishment. They need immediate and sustained attention so that they can not only serve the wide publics they historically served but also be strong bearers of Catholic culture, tradition, and world view. If these are to remain ministries of the Church—and we admit that is an open question—then we must find effective ways to prepare a new generation of spiritually mature and theologically educated lay persons who will lead them into the future.¹⁴ There are some very encouraging efforts, especially in Catholic health care; and even

Catholic colleges, universities, and secondary schools are reopening the “mission and identity” question with new creativity. Many communities of vowed religious are providing formation for lay leaders, including CEOs, staff, board members, faculty, and sponsors.¹⁵

Summary

Clearly it is a time of significant transition in the Roman Catholic community with serious impact on our seminaries as well as on the Church as a whole. There is urgency about the Church’s demands for ministry today—ministry not only in parish settings but in the wide variety of institutions sponsored by the Church as well. Priests and vowed religious were the traditional mainstays of this ecology; their reduced numbers today calls for new ways in which clergy, laity, and vowed religious can partner to revitalize this ecology.

The task force recognized that this transition is not just a Catholic phenomenon. All of our seminaries and all of our churches are undergoing significant changes. We learned much that concerned us, but there was also much that gave us hope. Despite the very real challenges that we face, we share a common hope that the Holy Spirit guides the Church and its ministry and a common conviction that we must not fail to respond to the Spirit’s promptings.

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ENDNOTES

1. Anthony Ruger, “Lean Years, Fat Years: Changes in the Financial Support of Protestant Theological Education,” *Auburn Studies*, no. 2 (New York, NY: Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education, December 1994).
2. It is important to note that most dioceses do not fund ministerial education for lay students. Lay students must often fund their own education or rely on financial aid provided by colleges, universities, and schools of theology. The significance of this can be seen by noting that in about the year 2000, the number of lay ecclesial ministers on parish staffs surpassed the number of priests in parish ministry. See *The Study of the Impact of Fewer Priests on the Pastoral Ministry* (unpublished preparatory document for the spring general meeting of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (June 15–17, 2000), iv, v.
3. These nonseminary settings include colleges, universities, and diocesan-sponsored ministry programs. See *Catholic Ministry Formation Enrollments: Statistical Overview for 2007–2008* (Washington, DC: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate [CARA], April 2008), <http://cara.georgetown.edu/Overview0708.pdf>.
4. ATS Annual Data Tables, <http://www.ats.edu/Resources/Documents/Annual-DataTables/2007-08AnnualDataTables.pdf>.
5. Ibid.
6. CARA, *Catholic Ministry Formation Enrollments*.

7. Dean Hoge's ongoing research on priests demonstrates this. See Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Evolving Visions of the Priesthood: Changes from Vatican II to the Turn of the Century* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), especially 113f.
8. Today there are 20,000 diocesan priests serving 18,500 parishes. Of those parishes, 35 to 40 percent now share a pastor, and about 3,000 have as a primary leader someone other than a resident, ordained pastor. Marti Jewel, "Major Findings of the Emerging Models Project" (keynote address, A National Ministry Summit: Emerging Models of Pastoral Leadership, Orlando, FL, April 21, 2008).
9. Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis has worked with the Henry Luce Foundation to identify problems parishes have in identifying and meeting their own ministerial needs. This project, "Tilling the Soil," led to a much bigger undertaking funded by Lilly Endowment and begun in 2005. The Apollos Project is designed to help a pilot group of parishes over five years to acquire the skills they need to identify and meet their needs for nonordained ministers. Further information is available at www.ai.edu/careers/apollos.
10. Bethel Theological Seminary's "In Ministry Program" is designed to allow working pastors to complete an MDiv in five years through online study and intensive on-campus sessions. It is a perfect example of adapting to the difficulties of requiring full-time residential study for ordination. Further information is available at www.seminary.bethel.edu/admissions/virtual/about.
11. Although Catholic candidates for priesthood get a strong academic formation, this does not necessarily mean they are intellectually creative. The Church's hierarchical structure and uniform doctrine run the risk of overemphasizing conformity at the expense of initiative and creativity.
12. One of us participated on a search committee for a campus minister at a Catholic university. The search committee had no idea that there was a significant difference between an MA and MDiv, much less between an MA and a two-year ministry program. In fact, the ad for the position sought only a candidate with a "master's degree in theology, ministry, or a related field."
13. Washington: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005.
14. Review of *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis* (Melanie M. Morey and John J. Piderit), by David Gentry-Aiken, in *Horizons—The Journal of the College Theology Society* 35, no. 1 (June 2, 2008). Aiken says, "We have to find a much more successful way of trying to replicate, for the next generation, what religious life formation did for people of my generation. We have to find a way of reviving some of the thick Catholic culture of the Pre-Vatican II era in ways that are healthy and non-reactionary."
15. For a description of some of these efforts, see Margaret Benefiel, "Spiritual Leadership: The Leader as Formator and Mentor" in *Called and Chosen: Toward a Spirituality for Lay Leaders*, ed. Zeni Fox and Regina Bechtel, S.C. (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward/Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 167–175.

The Church/Theological School Relationship in Canada: A Reflection on Historical and Recent Trends

Sandra Beardsall

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In her article, historian Sandra Beardsall sketches the distinctive developments in the relationship between theological schools and the churches in Canada. Beardsall begins her article with five vignettes that serve as examples of the contexts in which church/school relationships have been forged and fostered in Canada. She then traces the history of church/school relationships through three eras: a long period of colony and nation-building (1600s–1950s), the social and religious changes of the 1960s–1980s, and the challenges of recent history. Beardsall uses the metaphor of the social dance to illustrate the changing relationships of these periods, from the early shared project of nation-building and moral leadership, through the possibilities that came with the ecumenical developments of the 1960s, and then the complexities of the increasingly secular and pluralistic culture of the late twentieth century. She suggests some patterns that emerge in this narrative: Canadian schools are likely to be denominationally linked, with strong regional support bases; Canadian schools and churches readily form interdenominational and other partnerships; and Canadian theological schools are durable, capable of helping to strengthen and anchor the churches. Beardsall concludes with the hope that schools and churches together might find a dance pattern that allows them to retain their partners while mastering the steps needed to meet contemporary demands.

Preface

Like all who are engaged in the Theological School and the Church project, I come to the topic as a passionate stakeholder. I love the church of Jesus Christ, rather untidy “bride” that it is. I am deeply committed to the work of theological schools, as I have been entwined with one or the other of them for most of my adult life and currently serve on a seminary faculty. As a Canadian pastor, I seek the faithfulness and effectiveness of church and school in my national and regional contexts. As a historian, I value the exploration of what the churches and schools have been as well as what they are now. As a story lover, I want the narrative to make sense.

What follows, then, is an attempt to tell the story of the church/theological school relationship in Canada in a way that brings some order to a long and wide-ranging history. There has been little published about theological education in Canada, especially in the past twenty years, so I have carved the narrative from a variety of sources, including seminary histories, denominational reports, and recent institutional self-studies. I have not attempted to be comparative, but the parallels of the Canadian story with that of the United States

will be obvious at many points. You will see that I employ a series of linked metaphors to describe the changes I have detected in institutional culture and relationship. Sociologists offer a plethora of typologies for describing institutions. I assume that these are also informing the discussion, and that wherever I become “typological,” I am adding simply another voice to a crowded but significant conversation.

Introduction

Founding stories: Five vignettes

Le Séminaire de Québec. In the autumn of 1759, the directors of the Séminaire de Québec gathered in their war-ravaged town to investigate the damage to their school and make plans for the future. Two months earlier, Major-General James Wolfe had warned the inhabitants of Québec that “impudent bravery” and “misplaced stubbornness” would only incur “the fury of aggravated soldiers.” He and his troops then began a bombardment that ended not only with the death of both Wolfe and his French counterpart, Général Louis Joseph, the Marquis de Montcalm, but also with the surrender of Québec to British forces in September. Thousands of cannon hits had destroyed or seriously damaged most of the buildings in the walled town. The majestic and prominent Séminaire did not escape the carnage: one of its priests had died in the invasion.

The directors had yet more on their minds. The Séminaire was already nearly a century old: founded in 1663, it was a religious, political, and economic anchor for the many Francophone settlements along the St. Lawrence River. To sustain itself and feed its staff and students, the Séminaire owned and managed vast tracts of farmland, called *seigneuries*, and the war damage in these rural areas was considerable. The Conquest had also destroyed the Séminaire’s formal (and financial) links with France. Before they could repair the edifice, the Séminaire leaders had to rebuild its economic base. Despite these losses, the directors set to work, and by 1762 young seminarians were again swishing through the cobbled streets of Québec in their characteristic black *soutanes*.¹

The Pictou Academy. Thomas McCulloch, a medical doctor and Secession Presbyterian minister, began teaching in 1803 from his home and went on to found a college at Pictou, a Scots immigrant harbour town in Nova Scotia. Despite opposition from both Church of England and Church of Scotland leaders in the colony, McCulloch’s project found enough support to build a sturdy college building. In the summer of 1820, McCulloch decided to expand his academy to include the training of ministers. His ministry students worked as schoolteachers during the week and attended theology classes on weekends. Pine Hill, one of the colleges that merged to form the present-day ecumenical Atlantic School of Theology in Halifax, is a direct descendant of McCulloch’s weekend divinity hall.²

Trinity College, Toronto. In September 1852, fifteen men, aged 19 to 32, left their studies, boarding homes, and parish work at the Diocesan Theological Institute at Cobourg on Lake Ontario, eighty miles east of Toronto, to enrol at Trinity College, newly established at Toronto by their bishop, John Strachan.

Strachan, a powerful leader in colonial society, was smarting from the University Act that had recently disestablished King's College, Toronto, to create a secular university. He was determined that his clergy would still become "professional gentlemen" who would study for proper university degrees in a cloistered setting, so he closed the Cobourg Institute and established Trinity College for both undergraduate and divinity studies. The seminarians found themselves now living in an imposing structure in Gothic revival style, set at the edge of the city near a row of elegant homes newly built for government officials, a location intended to be both "bucolic and privileged," and deliberately placed several kilometres from the secular university.³ The seminarians would study the Scriptures in their original languages, the thirty-nine articles, the *Book of Common Prayer*, and the early Ecclesiastical writers. It was "hoped" that some arrangement would be made for giving them "some practical acquaintance with parochial duties."⁴

Lutheran Theological Seminary, Saskatoon. In October 1968, the mayor of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, was among the dignitaries to attend the ribbon cutting for the new building of the Lutheran Theological Seminary, the first Lutheran seminary in North America to be located on a secular university campus.⁵ The celebratory luncheon featured a variety of Lutheran ethnic dishes, highlighting the many nationalities represented by Lutherans in the region. The students invited a Roman Catholic priest from the next-door Pius X Seminary to preach at a service to celebrate their new location. Some of the Lutheran faculty did not attend the service, for fear of evoking the wrath of the wider church membership. "We heard a very Lutheran sermon on grace," reported the seminary's president, "and did not receive one word of reproach from the Lutheran constituency."⁶

Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Langley. The Mennonite Brethren trace their beginnings to the founding of a school in South Russia in the mid-1800s, yet the road to a seminary home has been a long and winding one for Mennonite Brethren in Canada. With a distinct history of immigration and settlement, and uncertain that the American Brethren understood their needs and ethos, the Canadian Conference initially declined to participate in the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, founded in Fresno, California, in 1955. Although they eventually joined Fresno in 1975,⁷ accessibility for Canadians led to the formation in British Columbia of an extension centre of the seminary in 1995. In 1999 the Mennonite Brethren moved this centre to Langley, British Columbia, to join with other believers' churches in the Associated Canadian Theological Schools (ACTS) Seminaries, at Trinity Western University. As both a constituent college of the ACTS consortium and an extension campus of the Fresno seminary, the Mennonite Brethren in Canada seem finally to have found their North American "theological kin."⁸

Purpose and Outline

These "founding" narratives offer a taste of the contexts in which church/school relationships have been forged and fostered in Canada. Myriad struggles have found their way into the quest for a trained clergy: the search for national and cultural identity, the contested landscape of church/state affairs,

the desire for accessible higher education, internecine battles within denominations, and the yearning for a space to cultivate theological leadership for one's "own" people. It is the purpose of this paper to explore, in general terms, the contours of the Canadian church/school relationship as it has unfolded through time. To take a historical perspective is to assume that the past has shaped these partnerships in particular ways and has imprinted upon them traits—patterns, stresses, and strengths⁹—that may help to predict future struggles and determine future directions. To begin this overview with particular vignettes is to suggest that the church/school partnership requires a certain "thickness" of description and attention to the complexity of contexts, even as we search for norms and common goals.

David G. Forney applies the helpful typology of *tethering* to his analysis of church/seminary relationships, differentiating associations of *tightly coupled*, *loosely coupled*, and *uncoupled*. In his article, "Tethered Together," he gives examples of each and explicates some of the tethers that couple a denomination and its school.¹⁰ I have extended that notion of coupling by using another metaphor that deals with partners and patterns: that of social dance. In social dance, partners must move not only with each other but also with other dancers in time to both external and internal rhythms (recognizing that not all Christians consider dance an appropriate activity). Thus, as I describe changing relationships, I will invoke the language of social dance at various points to help visualize or nuance the shifting shape of the church/school connection.

The essay will briefly set the Canadian context, followed by a description of three eras in the church/theological school relationship: the beginning of European settlement through the mid-twentieth century; the 1960s to 1980s; and the 1990s to the present time. The concluding section will suggest some patterns that emerge from this four-hundred-year history, in the hope of contributing to the discussion of possibilities and parameters for strengthening church/seminary partnerships.

Canada, Canadians, religion, and schools: Some facts and figures

Nearly ten million square kilometres in size, Canada is the world's second largest nation in landmass (after the Russian Federation), but its population of thirty million lives mostly in its southernmost regions, and most of Canada's large cities lie within one hundred kilometres of the American border. Except for the Pacific coast, the climate is one of varying degrees of extremes, with very cold winters in the north and the central plains (called the prairies), warm to hot summers in most places, and snowy winters on the Great Lakes and Atlantic coasts and in the mountainous interiors.

Populated throughout by aboriginal groups (known in Canada as First Nations), Canada was subsequently colonized by the French and the English. Explorers, fur traders, and missionaries from France and Britain were the first to interact with the First Nations, who signed multiple treaties with the Crown but were gradually pushed off arable land onto reserves. Settlers had been arriving since the early 1600s, especially in New France; British immigration increased in the mid-1800s. A series of expulsions, wars, and both European and First Nations/British treaties gave shape to an English colony: British North America.

Canada became a “dominion” in 1867, with an elected parliament and appointed senate, retaining the Queen as head of state through a resident Governor General. Its constitution remained an act of British parliament until it was repatriated in 1982. The land is rich in natural resources, which, along with manufacturing and agriculture, form the basis of the country’s economy. Canada and the United States are each other’s largest trading partners. The line separating the two nations is (so far) the world’s longest undefended border.

Twentieth century immigration boosted Canada’s population, which became increasingly urban and intercultural; its largest city, Toronto, is touted to be, per capita, the most ethnically diverse city in the world. Twenty-three per cent of Canadians claim French as at least one of their mother tongues, and more than 13 per cent of Canadians represent visible ethnic minorities. First Nations make up 3 per cent of the population. Many rural areas have experienced steady postwar depopulation, and some First Nations reserves suffer extreme poverty, especially those in isolated or resource-poor regions. There has been a tendency toward centrist governments and a moderately high expectation of state intervention in health care, social services, and education (there are relatively few private schools, and fewer still private universities), although these commitments have waned somewhat in the wake of the neoliberal global economies of the past two decades. Therapeutic abortion and same sex marriage are legal throughout the country; Canada abolished capital punishment in 1976.

Religiously, the population by census is 43 per cent Roman Catholic, 16 per cent “no religion,” 10 per cent United Church of Canada (a 1925 organic ecumenical union of Methodists, Congregationalists, and most Presbyterians), 7 per cent Anglican, 2.5 per cent Baptist, 2 per cent Lutheran, and 2 per cent Muslim, with “continuing” Presbyterians, Pentecostals, evangelicals, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs around 1 per cent each, and a number of groups less than 1 per cent. The religious groups with the greatest growth in the past decade—Muslim and Serbian Orthodox—represent recent immigration patterns.¹¹ Most seventeenth- through early twentieth-century Protestant congregations began with memberships of British stock, except for the Lutherans. There are also a few Francophone Protestant congregations, and twentieth-century immigration brought Dutch, Caribbean, Korean, Japanese, and African Protestants into Anglophone congregations; they also created their own ethnically specific congregations. In this essay I use the term *Protestant* in describing the pre-1960s churches to refer to the historically mainstream English-speaking denominations, recognizing that there is a wider ethnic diversity than such a moniker implies.

Trinity College and Emmanuel College, Toronto, were founding members of the American Association of Theological Schools in 1938; there are now thirty-six ATS accredited institutions in Canada. A handful of small non-ATS accredited theological schools also train clergy. All but three of the accredited schools have specific denominational relationships. Canadian seminaries are small: the two largest have 486 and 315 students (FTE); all the rest have fewer than 200 students (FTE).¹² Congregation size is also small relative to American churches. While some are large, mostly Roman Catholic parishes and evangelical congre-

gations, there are few megachurches. Canadian rural clergy are surprised to learn that Americans consider a congregation of fifty “small”; rural Canadians would usually label a congregation of fifty in the healthy midrange!

A large land and a scattered but diverse population create particular issues for all relationships, including, of course, that of church and theological school. These will become more evident in the narrative that follows.

Colony to nation (1600s–1950s): The stately Allemande of moral leadership

Canadians of European heritage share with others in the New World the experience of being at once colonizers and themselves colonized, and this impacted the churches in profound ways. As they attempted to wedge both the land and the First Nations into shoes of European design, they also struggled to free themselves from their parent nations and to claim new identities. The early immigrants relied upon the churches and mission societies of France and England to supply them with clergy, often with poor results. It was a costly venture, more so if, as regularly happened, the clergy from abroad could not cope with the harsh climate and the privations of a frontier society. Many also brought with them an air of superiority that rankled settler congregations.¹³

A locally trained clergy seemed the logical solution and led to various educational endeavours like those begun by Thomas McCulloch in Pictou and the Diocesan Training Institute in Cobourg. Church leaders, however, wanted more formal educational structures. Entrusted with building a Christian nation on North American soil, they saw a well-educated clergy as emblematic of this grander mission.

Roman Catholics in Québec

The founding of the Séminaire de Québec in 1663 offers an early illustration. Francois de Laval, the seminary founder and eventually Québec’s first bishop, wanted his new creation to be not only a training school for priests but also a base for all the priests of the diocese. Parishioners would pay their tithes to the Séminaire rather than to the local priest, and in return, the Séminaire would provide them with properly trained clergy.¹⁴ Although it did not sustain this overwhelming control of the diocese, the Séminaire’s social prominence was enhanced by its vast land holdings and its role in training the sons of the wealthy in the high school portion of its complex. (The *Petit Séminaire* was a high school; the *Grand Séminaire* was for priestly formation.)

British domination gave a new twist to the Québec Catholic Church’s role in nation building. As France moved toward revolution, there was a tendency to narrate the losses of the Conquest as a hidden, and perhaps divine, victory: they had spared Québec a godless, revolutionary future. The Church played a crucial role in negotiating the place of Francophone Catholics in an officially Protestant world. Its leaders would see that the populace remained loyal British subjects in return for the right to carry on in peace their religious, linguistic, and cultural practices. Again the Séminaire, and eventually a second school, the Grand Séminaire de Montréal, was vital to the vision. Immersed in

Tridentine piety and Thomistic theology, seminarians were to be formed in a way that would “distinguish the ministers of the true Church from the followers of heresy” (Protestants).¹⁵ Occasionally there were cries for more doctrinal purity among the faculty (mostly from Ultramontanists), but the seminary was able to procure glowing reviews from Rome.¹⁶ When Québec established its first university in 1852, it was the Séminaire that controlled it; the seminary superior was always the university rector, and the Archbishop was the Chancellor. “*Le Séminaire, c’est l’université, l’université, c’est le Séminaire*” was thus the reality for more than a century.¹⁷

Protestants and Anglicans

The dominant Anglophone churches were also fervently engaged in the nation-building project from the eighteenth through mid-twentieth centuries, in their case on behalf of the hegemonic cultural and religious worldview. As Canada took on “dominion” status, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists, convention Baptists, and Congregationalists readily adopted the role of guardians and bearers of cultural and moral values for the nation. This mission required a well-prepared indigenous clergy. As a Presbyterian writer put it in 1830: “A literary and theological seminary to train up for the Ministry young men of piety and talents, and acquainted with the habits and wants of the country and inured to its hardships is indispensably necessary.”¹⁸ Part of the urgency was the oft-repeated fear that if good education were not available at home, potential clergy would head for training to the “republic to the south,” perhaps never to return.

Undergraduate education was essential to this task, in part to provide baccalaureate training for clergy and in part to ensure that the youth of the nation “might be won once for all to the bosom of the church.”¹⁹ Thus, theological schools and undergraduate colleges were often founded together. As settlement moved west, the churches were at the forefront in initiating institutions of higher learning; indeed most of the universities founded in Canada before the 1960s originated as religious foundations.²⁰ The church schools generally relied on numerous small donations for their survival: laity and clergy who believed in the cause and gave, often sacrificially.²¹ Gradually, through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most of the Protestant church-founded undergraduate colleges, with their seminaries in tow, federated with or transformed themselves into secular state-sponsored universities (in invariably complex formal agreements). Almost all Canadian universities thus became public institutions, and theological schools received (and continue to receive) provincial educational grants because they offered university-level education. Both the theological schools and the church leaders generally greeted these developments enthusiastically; they were marks of a nation growing and maturing.

For an example of this mindset, we can turn to the fate of Bishop Strachan’s vision for Trinity College: a private Anglican enclave intended to produce an elite and educated upper class for a (wrongly, in his view) disestablished colony. Support for such a college was never strong in the Toronto diocese, and in 1877 Strachan’s more evangelical rivals founded another Anglican col-

lege, Wycliffe, which was federated with the University of Toronto and located on its campus. Trinity, financially troubled and academically isolated, finally joined the federated university in 1904, having sold its "bucolic" estate and built a new building directly across the road from Wycliffe.²² Trinity's move highlights a significant feature of the church/school relationship. Canadian Protestant and Anglican church leaders viewed their theological schools' close connections with the country's universities not as threats to the church/school relationship, but as integral to their mission as architects of a moral, progressive, and Christian Canada.

Relationships between the theological schools and their sponsoring denominations were close, but not necessarily harmonious. The Protestant and Anglican schools weathered the late nineteenth/early twentieth century debates around "higher criticism" with only some fallout; a Methodist professor in Toronto had to resign in 1892, for example, for "asserting too publicly that the Old Testament prophets did not have Jesus specifically in mind."²³ Church/school conflict rather mirrored the progressive project of the national church and centred on the need to include contemporary issues (psychology, social sciences) and better practical training for ministers.

These debates occurred within varying levels of control by the national churches. The United Church, as Canada's largest Protestant denomination, inherited from Methodists and Presbyterians numerous theological schools and colleges across the nation (the Congregationalists brought just one theological school into the union). Its (national) General Council set a general list of required subject areas (not courses), gave generous financial sponsorship, and approved the colleges' board and faculty appointments. It also asserted, however, the desire that the "individual colleges should have large powers vested in them because 'centralization of authority in a country of the dimensions and diversity of ours does not work well.'"²⁴ Continuing Presbyterians (after the church union of 1925) maintained a similar level of oversight. Anglicans did not develop national oversight of their schools; each Anglican seminary was, however, related to the church through its board and the support of the bishop and diocesan structures in its region. In sum, the Protestant and Anglican churches and schools, while not always of one mind, were, throughout this long era, firmly linked as one another's primary partners.

Other Christians

While Roman Catholics in Québec and mainline Protestants and Anglicans throughout Canada were establishing their authority, in part through their colleges and theological schools, other immigrant cultures were also planting churches and founding schools. Lutherans of various nationalities and denominational stripes in pockets of southern Ontario and on the prairies held an educated clergy in high esteem. They founded seminaries as they could, since although they were members of American Lutheran denominations, they could not count on their American counterparts to provide clergy. Roman Catholics outside Québec often relied on missionary orders for their priests but did find some diocesan seminaries. East Europeans tended to send to the "old country" and the United States for clergy, and Mennonites

founded Bible schools. Most of these groups were linguistically isolated for a generation upon arrival, and even progressive Protestants considered them culturally inferior, occasionally as objects of proselytism. Small evangelical Christian groups emerged in Canada in the early twentieth century, mostly from American movements (although they were less likely to take fundamentalist stances than their American counterparts). The evangelicals, too, founded Bible schools, but their ecclesiologies and “outsider” identity made them generally suspicious of higher education and hostile to the notion of a seminary-trained clergy.²⁵

The stately Allemande

The Allemande is a graceful dance that originated in sixteenth-century Germany but spread to both court and peasant dance halls in France and England. In its oldest form, it features a lead couple, who may dance alone or be followed by other couples in a procession of stately, flowing steps. The woman frequently twirls elegantly away from and back to her male partner. Couples grip their partners firmly and acknowledge the other dancing couples politely; ideally all the dancers execute their steps in exact unison.

The church/school relationship in Canadian life to the mid-twentieth century exhibits some of this dignity and parallel progression. Theological schools were truly the partners of their creators, the denominational churches’ leadership. Both the church leaders and their schools operated on the assumption that they were accomplishing a common, portentous work, even if the schools occasionally twirled self-indulgently away from their church partners. Other dancers—the universities, the donors, the seminarians, and other Christian communities—were to be acknowledged, but were expected to follow in line and to hold the same views and values as did the dominant denominations and their leaders and scholars. Those not wishing to follow watched quietly from the sidelines.

The Allemande, all the rage in Paris and London for a time, did not, however, survive in its sixteenth-century form. Likewise, with the advent of the 1960s, the church/seminary tune was about to change.

The 1960s–1980s: The sociable Grand Chain

The 1960s did not bring Canada the immense social, political, and racial upheaval experienced by the United States. It was nonetheless a decade when the profound changes that had been building in Canadian society throughout the twentieth century came to fruition, with startling consequences for Canada’s Christian churches. The growing notion of a “welfare state” blossomed in the postwar period. Between 1945 and 1975 the number of federal government employees tripled.²⁶ As the state, with the enthusiastic support of the Protestant and Anglican churches, took over most of the responsibility for health, education, and social welfare, the overt role of these churches in public life declined. The postwar explosion of technology and industry; the population boom that gave rise to a well-fed, curious generation of 1960s young people; a growing postwar “internationalism” and tolerance of cultural difference; an

emerging sense of a “Canadian identity”; and the political foment to the south all placed the Christian churches on unknown footing. The denominational responses to these new realities would have significant impact on the church/school relationship.

The mainstream Protestant/Anglican schools and ecumenical, professional education

The leaders of the Protestant and Anglican churches responded with more zeal than alarm to the social changes of the 1960s. They did note with concern the drop in membership and the loss of privilege that began in the United, Presbyterian, and Anglican churches in the early to mid-1960s, and they commented on falling enrolments in their theological schools as the decade wore on. However, most did not realize it was a downward trend from which no mainstream church would recover. Instead, they saw this era as a call to refresh their theological thinking and to engage more vigorously with the world. Once again, the theological schools would be instrumental in the churches’ mission, this time in the name of ecumenical endeavour.

The United and Anglican churches had restarted union negotiations in the late 1950s, and by the late 1960s, organic union seemed imminent (in fact, the union talks failed in 1975). These developments, and the ecumenical overtures of Second Vatican Council, had created a lively ecumenical environment across the country. Church leaders talked to each other regularly across denominational lines. They discovered similar challenges: most of the major denominations—Roman Catholic, United, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Lutheran—were evaluating ministry and education. The Convention Baptists were eager to join the conversation. The United Church, which had, almost from its inception, tried unsuccessfully to close one or more of its theological schools (having inherited seminaries from all three founding denominations) saw in this ecumenical moment an opportunity to deal with its “overcapacity.” The Anglican Church had similar views, and the others faced similar financial and enrolment issues. In 1970 the six denominations formed The Coordinating Committee on Theological Education (CCTE), which, along with an endowed foundation, was to provide an overview of theological education across Canada and foster ecumenical education wherever possible.²⁷

At the same time, clusters of schools and regional church judicatories were also in conversation, imagining an ecumenical future for their seminaries. Out of these discussions blossomed a number of ecumenical theological schools that included mainstream Protestant, Anglican, and Roman Catholic partners. The participants in most of these ecumenical clusters or “organically united” schools could cite a long history of regional cooperation, at both church and school levels.²⁸ There was also increased cooperation among schools that did not form unions, to the point that by the mid-1970s, the majority of mainstream Protestant seminarians in Canada were studying theology ecumenically.

While the churches at their national levels were promoting ecumenical education, they were not as prepared for the particular configurations that would result or for the ways that these new relationships would complicate the church/school partnership. Imagining that consolidation and national

collective oversight would empower the church leaders, they instead found themselves often sidelined as their schools took on new, ecumenical identities, which were sometimes attached to deeper connections to secular universities. In the end, the CCTE (which merged with the foundation and was renamed in 1990 the Churches' Council on Theological Education) never wielded the influence its founders intended for it, although it continues to this day to support ventures in ecumenical theological education.²⁹

The 1960s–1980s brought other changes to the church/school relationship. Society's waning enchantment with a mother church and its paternal pastors coincided with the large influx of women and second-career men to ministry studies. In their rethinking of "ministry," many in church leadership began to identify ordination with "professional" preparation. The introduction of Clinical Pastoral Education units and increasing participation in ATS and in the Association for Theological Field Educators helped meet these goals. Again, while church leaders supported these developments, they created yet another dimension of relationship for their theological schools. While some of these changes put theological students more directly in contact with congregational members through field education and chaplaincy placements, they did not necessarily enhance formal judicatory/school relationships, as they added standards and criteria for pastoral education that were not directly within control of the churches.

The evangelical emergence

The decades following the 1960s brought new opportunities to Canadian evangelical Christians. From the late nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth, the mainstream Protestant churches had claimed themselves to be "evangelical"; the progressivism of the early twentieth century did not entirely eclipse the sense that Protestants were still helping to create a Christian Canada. Personal evangelism and group "crusades" were part of Protestant rhetoric until the late 1960s. Canada's new pluralism did not privilege mainstream denominations as before. This shift, and the clearly "liberal" agenda of the mainstream churches, helped the smaller churches to claim their identity as "the" evangelical churches in Canada. While their membership numbers remained relatively small, their participation rates were significantly higher than for mainstream Christians. Their new confidence in their ability to provide serious religious leadership pointed evangelicals gradually to value post-secondary education and eventually to the desire to train pastors.³⁰

From the 1960s on, Canadian evangelicals began to found new institutions or modify existing ones to provide an alternative to secular education. During these decades, they relied heavily on American professors, administrators, funding, and even students, while Canadian evangelicals warmed to the idea of postsecondary training.³¹ While particular denominations usually founded these colleges, they did so with the hope of attracting partners with shared beliefs and of presenting themselves as inter- or nondenominational.³² Yet denominational relations remained important, especially as the evangelical churches developed an interest in seminary training. Seminary collaboration actually helped to foster closer ties among believers' church denominations like the Mennonite Brethren who had, until recently, experienced their faith in isolation.

The Roman Catholic aggiornamento

If all Canadian Christians experienced change and challenge during the 1960s, Roman Catholics experienced an utter remaking of life and identity. As we have seen, Canadian Catholics immersed themselves in ecumenical discussion and endeavour and became partners in theological education with their Protestant neighbours. They became ATS members and populated their theological programs with women and lay men while they faced a dramatic decline in candidates for priesthood. Of course, they also coped with a sense of loss; as one seminary rector of the time puts it: "I managed to muster enough courage out of a spirit of obedience, but not with any marked enthusiasm, to accept the changes and responsibilities entailed."³³

In the province of Québec, however, the change was even more profound. During the previous decades of the twentieth century, Québec's religious communities had been in ascendancy, as Québec continued to resist modernism and cultural change. During the 1950s, six professors left the Séminaire de Québec to become bishops.³⁴ By 1959, Québec had one of the highest rates in the world of membership in celibate religious communities: one for every eighty-five Catholics.³⁵ Church and seminary were almost indistinguishable. The 1960s, however, brought Québec Catholics into a critical engagement with their own culture and the wider world, in a social movement commonly called "la Révolution Tranquille" (the Quiet Revolution). A backlash against the church ensued, and church attendance plummeted. Vocations for the priesthood evaporated. The universities became secular domains. The two seminaries, in Montréal and Québec, reshaped themselves to fit the era. In both cases, the faculties of theology became based in the associated universities, while the seminaries retained the role of "formation." Although the Grand Séminaire de Québec had moved with the rest of Laval University to a modern postwar campus in the 1950s, it returned in 1979 to its original stone complex in the old walled city, leaving the faculty of theology behind at the new campus. Having forfeited so much, the Séminaire did not want to lose also its claim on that historic space and lineage.

The sociable Grand Chain

The Grand Chain is a folk dance formation. Standing in a square or circle, couples turn to each other and then weave in opposite directions around the circle of dancers, taking hands with each briefly as they pass. Dancers meet their partners half way around, and then back at their "home" position. The Grand Chain is a sociable figure, and dancers are encouraged to make eye contact and smile as they greet one another in the circle. At the same time, if they dally too long, they will fail to get home before the music ends.

Canadian church/school relationships in the 1960s–1980s may be said to resemble a Grand Chain. Church leaders and theological schools both set out on an adventure in meeting and greeting an ever-expanding network of partners: ecumenical, academic, cultural, and professional. For evangelicals, these new relationships could be empowering for church as well as school. For Roman Catholics, this expanding network gave fresh opportunity to women and lay men, even as it left priestly formation in a strange new world. And for

Protestants and Anglicans, it was a time of busy creativity for the schools in their new ecumenical and professional settings, while the church judicatories were left to wonder if their own seminary partners would make it home before the music stopped.

The 1990s to the present: Learning the Tarantella

The past fifteen years have increased both the stresses and the possibilities for theological schools and their denominations. As the number of Canadians professing “no religion” has surpassed the membership of all denominations except the Roman Catholic, the mainstream Protestant churches have continued to face declining memberships and revenues. Some evangelical churches have grown, but others have declined. Some seminaries are flourishing, some floundering, and all must be keenly aware and occasionally wary of the worlds they inhabit. Their issues are no longer as easily divided by denomination. While the recent past is often the hardest to interpret, some stresses and opportunities emerge as confronting the Canadian church/seminary relationship.

Finances and enrolment

It probably comes as no surprise that budgets and student numbers put great strain on church/school relationships. National and regional offices of the largest denominations struggle mightily to stay afloat financially. Denominational revenues, already declining due to falling memberships, have been further depleted by the restitution payments the Roman Catholic, Anglican, United, and Presbyterian churches have made to former students of Indian Residential Schools.³⁶ The theological schools thus receive their grants from dwindling pools of denominational resources. In some cases church funding has decreased so drastically that the provincial government education grant to a seminary exceeds the national or regional denominational grant. This has removed the financial carrot/stick option from the denominations and also pressed the seminaries to cast a wider net for funders, educational partners, and students. The disjuncture can be painful: the denomination may still officially “call the tune,” even though it doesn’t “pay the piper.”

Financial burdens have also meant that in many seminaries faculty vacancies are replaced with contract or sessional teachers. While sometimes these contract faculty are denominational pastors who help build bridges between church and school, they may not be as integrated into the ethos and administrative work of the school and are therefore less likely to be engaged in the intentional church/seminary relationship.

At the same time, and contributing to the financial challenge, enrolments are growing in only a few seminaries and falling in many. Church leaders ask why they should continue to support institutions that do not supply them with sufficient numbers of clergy. Schools ask why the mainstream churches have abandoned their ministry of recruitment. Some seminaries have begun to recruit aggressively by bypassing the judicatories and working directly with congregations.

Shifts in training requirements away from or towards seminaries

Some United Church and Anglican leaders seeking for a “fix” for their denominations’ declining status have looked to the training of clergy as the source of the problem. One can detect the unspoken assumption that better clergy might “save” the faltering denomination and that the problem with the clergy lies in their training. Add to this the time and expense required to train ordination candidates, the fact that through the 1990s most candidates were older and eager to get to ordination, and a suspicion of the value of academic education, and a logical solution emerges: train clergy in apprenticeship models that minimize academic learning and maximize pastoral experience.

This shift would represent a return to the early nineteenth-century models, ones the mainstream churches forsook in their quest for national moral leadership. Now that this quest has been drastically altered, it should not be surprising that nonseminary options would re-emerge. Alternative training has also developed for First Nations ministry candidates in some denominations as well as for diaconal and other specialized ministries. Roman Catholics have developed new categories of parish leadership, in part to deal with the shortage of ordained priests.

These changes have come as “additions” to the classic models of preparation for ministry, requiring seminaries to expand and adapt, seek partnerships with these alternative models, or suffer the depletion of students and resources that these models represent. They also muddy the vocational waters; do the denominations still value MDiv-trained ordained clergy? Is it a call worth pursuing? These new models can therefore threaten the “privileged” nature of the church/school relationship.

Meanwhile, many evangelical denominations are moving in the other direction: seeking seminary-trained pastors to serve their increasingly educated congregations and seeking doctoral degrees for their seminary and Bible college faculties. These shifts, which took place earlier in American evangelical denominations, factor in the growth of the evangelical seminaries in Canada. Of the eight seminaries in Canada with one hundred or more students (FTE), four are evangelical, including the two largest. The move to extend the educational experience for pastors will take the evangelical seminaries deeper into the waters of the church/school relationship.

Flexible learning opportunities

Seminaries, like other academic institutions, are learning to live in an academic world where students expect more flexibility in the ways they access their theological education. This includes both the delivery (for example, Internet and “intensive”) and the kind of programs seminaries offer, often leading to various tracks and several degree programs at any one school. This increased flexibility presents the seminaries with challenges that are familiar to ATS. It also impacts the church’s role in the life of its students. Flexibility means that students are less likely to spend their entire degree program under the roof of the denominational seminary and/or are less likely to emerge as congregational pastors. Evangelical schools and some mainstream Protestant schools court American and overseas students, promising them accredited ed-

education at far cheaper tuition costs than in the United States, due largely to the aforementioned government funding for postsecondary education, including theological degrees. This situation creates trans-border challenges for denominational oversight of students.

Flexible learning can either strengthen or weaken the relationships among schools. It can enrich connections among schools as they cooperate in delivering particular pieces of a flexible program or in training one another's students. But it also creates a market atmosphere that pits schools against one another as they compete for potential students.

The "academic orbit"

In the 1960s–1980s era, one of the church's biggest rivals for the hand of the seminaries appeared to be the university. Denominational reports accused faculty of dwelling in ivory towers, and seminaries complained that they were being "turned into trade schools" when in fact they saw themselves now in the "academic not the church orbit."³⁷ In the past fifteen years, however, this issue has taken a different shape.

In recent times, the universities have sometimes proven to be less than attentive suitors, closing religious studies departments and expressing more interest in the seminaries' centrally situated historic buildings than in their theological offerings. At the same time, a new generation of faculty has emerged in the seminaries; they tend to be more attentive to teaching skills and are more likely to have been trained in praxis models of doing theology. Many recent self-studies from Canadian schools highlight the ways that their faculty members serve the church constituency at national, regional, and local levels. Evangelical seminaries often require their faculty to sign a faith statement and to be connected to a congregation.

The Canadian religious academic societies have also become stronger in recent years, and scholars of all theological stripes and from most seminaries in Canada meet to share research and build collegiality at an annual Canadian Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences as well as at AAR/SBL events. These experiences have aided particularly in breaking down the walls between mainstream and evangelical scholars. Another source of faculty collegiality are the scholarly networks that exist within some Canadian denominations. These networks have been reinforced by grants that bring scholars together to discuss teaching in the denomination.

The "academic orbit," then, while it still consumes the seminaries' attention to varying degrees, has also become a more integrated part of the theological teaching life. What does it mean for the denominations? In some ways an informal partnership is a harder one to reckon with. In an ideal world, the churches would find ways to link to these fruitful networks of theological engagement. However, it would mean relinquishing a long-held assumption that scholarly study and the practice of ministry are necessarily rivals.³⁸

New church/church relationships

While the schools have been busy finding new partners, funders, students, and colleagues, many of the churches have also been actively pursuing new

relationships. The Lutheran and Anglican churches in Canada came into full communion in 2001, and the Anglican and United Churches have resumed formal dialogue. Churches continue to participate at regional levels in chaplaincy and social outreach programs. Part of the reconciliation process with Canada's First Nations involves deeper attention to the relationship between aboriginal and nonaboriginal Christians. Congregations of several denominations, particularly in depopulating rural areas and some inner city core neighbourhoods, are forming partnerships across denominational boundaries to preserve local ministries. These emerging church/church partnerships offer the seminaries both further complexities and further opportunities.

Attempts to strengthen formal relationships

Many of the changes of the past decade have threatened to weaken the bonds of the church/school relationship, but a few have sought to strengthen them. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) reorganized in a way that would give the national bishop a stronger presence in its two theological schools, which are synodical entities. However, there was suspicion that this move included a desire to close one of the ELCIC's two seminaries, and the synods balked at this intervention. The national presence has thus been largely symbolic; the national bishop usually sends a representative to seminary board meetings. The Anglican Church of Canada is a participant in the Theological Education for the Anglican Communion project, which is establishing norms and competencies for a wide range of ministries within the Anglican Church. Since the responsibility for ordination lies with the diocesan bishop, this project will help give the national church a larger role in the life of the seminaries and provide for standardization and perhaps better communication across the Canadian Anglican educational network. Meanwhile, at least one of the three evangelical seminaries that began without an official church sponsor is engaged in working with denominations and regional pastors to forge closer links.

The ATS relationship

The past decade has seen the evangelical schools obtaining ATS accreditation in significant numbers, so that now most seminaries in Canada participate in the life and work of the Association. Their leaders (administrators, board members, faculty) encounter one another in conferences, workshops, committees, and site visits. They have learned the language of strategic planning, self-study, and standards, and this new vocabulary has also helped to reshape them as institutions. In many ways, ATS plays the role of primary oversight that church judicatories once did (or wanted to do): offering scrutiny, support, and correction. (An accrediting report notation is a fearsome thing!) ATS sometimes functions to protect the school from the whims of church decision makers, and its standards help even quite disparate theological schools to recognize common goals. Of course, ATS does its work for the "benefit of communities of faith and the broader public,"³⁹ and it indeed protects the church from the whims of seminary decision makers. Yet its powerful role in the life of individual seminaries and in the shared lives of the seminary community cannot but complicate the church/school relationship.

Learning the Tarantella

The Tarantella is a traditional dance from southern Italy, famously known for the wild whirling it entails. Legend links it to the deadly bite of the tarantula spider, which could be cured only by frenzied dancing. Dancing the Tarantella by one's self was said to be unlucky, so it was always danced in couples. It is a circle dance, performed clockwise until the music quickens, signaling for everyone to change direction. This cycle occurs several times, eventually becoming so fast that it is very difficult to keep up with the beat.⁴⁰

The current church/theological school relationship has some of the frenetic characteristics of the Tarantella. A dizzying array of demands concerning the kind, quality, and accessibility of theological education force the churches and the schools to whirl one another faster and faster. The looming threat of failure and collapse in a secular and pluralistic culture prods both the churches and the seminaries themselves to stretch their resources further and become ever more all things to all seekers. All are aware of the dangers of "dancing alone," so the search for partners of all sorts adds to the frenzy. Learning to whirl to the mad demands of the music sometimes seems the only way to survive.

It turns out, of course, that the bite of the tarantula is not fatal. Is there a message in that fact for the current church/school dance pattern?

Summing up: *La Danse Macabre* or the Schiehallion reels?

The purpose of this study has been to look for patterns and strengths in Canadian church/theological school relationships by reviewing a history of these partnerships. The temptation is to view only the past few years, assuming the previous history to be gone and forgotten. I would argue, however, that a longer view offers a more thorough witness to the nature of these relationships. Without precluding other observations, I would like to suggest three patterns that I see emerging from the narrative.

Firm knots, but long ropes

To return to David Forsey's tethering typology, I believe we can assert that most Canadian theological schools—with the exception of two or three evangelical seminaries that were uncoupled from the start—began life as tightly coupled entities and have moved to a place of somewhat loose coupling. No denominationally founded seminary has yet come completely uncoupled, and some of those that began life uncoupled now actively seek denominational partnerships.

The loosening of bonds has usually come, however, through mutual agreement: the desire for a broader, richer theological engagement. When, for example, Trinity College and the Lutheran Theological Seminary moved to university campuses, or when the Roman Catholic seminaries reconfigured themselves into theological schools, it was because their churches wanted to encounter the world in new ways, and wanted their schools to be emblematic of that new engagement. It is not, I would argue, in the historical nature of the Canadian schools to burst their denominational tethers, even as they form a variety of relationships, and/or find themselves in dispute with their denominational judicatories.

To this end, as we imagine new possibilities for the church/school relationship, we need not assume that loose coupling leads to untethering. While each denomination and school share a unique set of tethers, the overall picture is one of fairly firm knots linking the church and school but with long ropes that allow for considerable flexibility of movement and decision making. Perceived regional distinctions loom large in Canadian identity discussions, and these spill over into religious communities, mitigating any attempt to rein the two in too closely.⁴¹

Multiple partners

Historian Robert Handy reported in 1982 that it seemed Canadian theological schools were “closer than the ‘typical’ American seminary to both church and university.”⁴² From the 1600s, when Francois de Laval linked his seminary with his parishes, to the present-day proliferation of relationships, the tendency to form multiple partnerships peppers the narratives of most Canadian seminaries. A small population in a vast land and the absence of a large moneyed elite class has meant that most theological schools have necessarily maintained themselves through cultivating regional networks of alumni; faithful lay supporters, congregations, and organizations; and by affiliating with the other educational institutions in their midst. All of these groups have a proprietary interest in the seminary enterprise. They believe it is their right to criticize, intervene, and defend the school.⁴³

In turn, the schools have had to learn to navigate these various currents. For example, Emmanuel College, Toronto, notes that in sorting out its complex multiple university relationships: “we discover the wisdom of starting with concrete practices and of looking for polarities to be managed rather than conflict-causing polarizations.”⁴⁴ Newman Theological College, Edmonton, states that its governance relies on a “bond of trust” among the school and church participants in its oversight.⁴⁵

The “church” is, for the seminary, far more than the judicatory body that oversees or works with its board. It is the many groups and persons who come into contact with the schools and its faculty, staff, and students. The current mission statements of most Canadian schools highlight their multiple relationships, with language like that used by Vancouver School of Theology: “Denominational commitment, ecumenical action and interfaith engagement.”⁴⁶ Any strategies for strengthening the church/school bond in Canada must consider that this relationship exists—and always has, for most schools—within a significant extended “church” and “nonchurch” family.

Seminaries are hardy

Many Canadian theological schools were conceived for reasons that are no longer crucial to the denominations who birthed them. Once extant, however, they have taken on lives of their own, apart from their parent churches. They have their own “thickness” of being: buildings, endowments, lecture-ships, alumni, emeriti, and grand narratives of triumph and tragedy. Their trials have made them stronger; they have learned to adapt to changes in the theological weather. Their dense webs of partnership ensure that it will be dif-

ficult for denominations to close them. In a time of dwindling resources, this resilience could be a gift to the church. Could seminaries be, rather than the millstones they sometimes seem, anchors that help hold fragile communions together? Longevity does not guarantee survival, of course. Nonetheless, the hardiness of theological schools should also feature in any attempt to improve the church/school relationship.

To conclude: La Danse Macabre or the Schiehallion reels?

La Danse Macabre (Dance of Death) seems to have begun as a mimed sermon in fifteenth-century France in which the various orders of society were dragged away by their own corpses—a warning about the ubiquity and suddenness of death. There are those in church and seminary who predict such an apocalypse for some or all of the Christian church, for particular schools, or for the church/school relationship in Canada. There is no doubt that financial struggles have brought much of the church's life to the brink in recent years. The burden of spreading themselves too thin, of trying to do more with fewer material resources, of being ignored and even despised in contemporary Canadian society, has left many in the church, from congregations to denominational officers to seminary boards, feeling weak and vulnerable. Most seminary leaders have heard the joke about the theological college president who had been banished to hell and was there for two weeks before she realized she had died.⁴⁷ The ATS Theological Schools and the Church project, however, and indeed the promise of the gospel to which the whole theological education enterprise is consecrated, assert that there is another way than that of death.

The Schiehallion reels are a formation of Scottish country dance. Four couples start in a square, standing beside their partners. Through a series of calculated steps and turns, each dancer traces a delicate pattern around the other dancers, eventually ending back beside her or his partner. Spritely, yet elegant, Schiehallion reels have been programmed into Scottish dances to evoke scenes from nature and life: waves lapping on a New Zealand shore or an ancient prairie buffalo stampede. The Schiehallion reels are easy to dance—once one knows the pattern.

Perhaps the church/seminary relationship in Canada could be compared, at its best, to Schiehallion reels: the school and its primary church partner starting and ending together, but navigating their partnership through a well-constructed series of other associations and commitments. The aim is not to simplify the pattern, for then it would lose its elegance and life. Nor is the object to overcomplicate it with extra twirls and gaudy spins. Rather, the goal is to learn and practice the complex relational patterns so that they make sense and flow gently into each other. To strengthen the church/school relationship, then, would be to aid in the tracing and learning of the patterns that give beauty and grace to the life they share.

Thus it might be, by the grace of the One who invited us to the dance in the first place, that

To turn, turn will be our delight
'Til by turning, turning,
We come round right.⁴⁸

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23. John W. Grant, "Theological Education at Victoria," in *From Cobourg to Toronto: Victoria University in Retrospect – The Sesquicentennial Lectures, 1986*, ed. Goldwin S. French and Gordon L. McLennan (Toronto: Chartres Books, 1989), 90.
24. United Church of Canada, "Report of the Committee on Theological Colleges," *Report of Proceedings, 7th General Council, 1936*, 323. Cited in Nathan H. Mair, *Education for Ministry in The United Church of Canada: An Historical Probe* (United Church of Canada, 1983), 24.
25. See Calvin B. Hanson, *On the Raw Edge of Faith: the Miracle of Trinity Western University* (n.p.: 1977).
26. For much of this context-setting information I am indebted to the summary presented in Gary R. Miedema, *For Canada's Sake: Public Religion, Centennial Celebrations, and the Re-making of Canada in the 1960s* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 14–40.
27. Lloyd Gesner, *The Churches' Council on Theological Education in Canada* (Toronto: CCTE, 1990) 2–6.
28. Carol Ann Goodine charts this cooperation in "Origins of Atlantic School of Theology" (MA thesis, St. Mary's University, Halifax, 1993).
29. For the example of Emmanuel College, Toronto, see Phyllis Airhart, "Ecumenical Theological Education and Denominational Relationships," in *Theological Education in Canada*, ed. Graham Brown (Toronto: United Church Publishing House), 21–23.
30. John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction to its Character* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 145.
31. Hanson, *On the Raw Edge*, describes the initial hostility he encountered among Canadian Evangelical Free Church members as he helped to found Trinity Western College, 46–47.
32. See, for example, Regent College Self-Study, November 1984, 2.
33. Kevin J. Kirley, c.s.b., "A Seminary Rector in English Canada During and After the Second Vatican Council," *Canadian Catholic Historical Association*, Study Sessions 43 (1976), 57.
34. Caulier, et al., *De l'harmonie tranquille*, 281.
35. Marion Scott, "The Quiet Evolution," in *Canadian Geographic* (Sept./Oct. 2006), 70.
36. Indian Residential Schools, to which First Nations children were sent or coerced into attending, practised systematic and often brutally enforced cultural assimilation,

as well as being places of privation and abuse for many of the students. The churches operated the schools in cooperation with, and funded by, the federal government.

37. Brian J. Fraser, *Church, College, and Clergy: A History of Theological Education at Knox College, Toronto, 1844–1994* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 198.

38. John Grant stated in 1986 that in the United Church "there has always been some resistance to the promotion of theological scholarship as a major emphasis." ("Theological Education at Victoria," 97.)

39. From the ATS Mission Statement.

40. Information on the Tarantella is taken from en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarantella.

41. For example: the need for regional flexibility was one argument used to defeat a proposal for more strictly standardized ordination training in the United Church at its national triennial meeting in August 2006.

42. Robert T. Handy, "Trends in Canadian and American Theological Education, 1880–1980: Some Comparisons," *Theological Education* 18, no. 2 (1982), 209.

43. As an example of this, the Atlantic School of Theology altered its denominational formation in the mid-1980s. The alumni and the students of the time each independently assert that it was their particular constituency that brought about the change. For the alumni version, see George H. MacLean, *The Pine Hill Alumni Association Story* (Halifax: Oxford Street Press, 1994), 26–27. The student version was by personal communication.

44. Emmanuel College Self-Study Report, Sept. 2001, 18.

45. Newman Theological College Self-Study Report, 1996, 72.

46. From the Values Statement posted on the VST website, www.vst.edu.

47. Quoted in Hordern, *Challenged by Change*, 148.

48. From "Simple Gifts," by Joseph Brackett, Jr., 1848.

The Seminaries and the Churches: Looking for New Relationships

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This article, by American church historian Timothy Weber, traces historical developments in the relationship between theological schools and the church within the United States. Many theological schools were founded by denominations, reflecting the particular character and emphases of those bodies. Some schools left their denominational roots, while additional schools were founded as independent institutions. Weber traces the variety of authority structures found in theological schools in the United States that reflect both the character of the ecclesial bodies with which they are associated and the nature of the relationship. He then outlines the dramatic changes that have taken place in theological education since the 1960s, as well as changes within the church in the United States, and analyzes theories that seek to explain these changes. The article concludes with reflections on the future challenges and opportunities for theological schools in the United States and the churches they serve.

Introduction

Seminaries and the churches are connected in important and even essential ways. In his address to the 2004 ATS Biennial Meeting, Daniel Aleshire summarized well this special relationship:

Most seminaries were founded by church bodies, or struggles within ecclesial communities, or religious movements that, typically, mature into church bodies. Most theological schools continue in some pattern of relationship. There is no parallel in other forms of graduate professional education. Law schools were not founded by courts or legislatures or law firms. Medical schools were seldom founded by hospitals. Few graduate schools of business have been founded by corporations. Theological schools have a one-of-a-kind relationship with the communities that established them.¹

While this relationship is undeniable, it is not uniform. Even a casual examination of ATS-affiliated institutions shows that they relate to churches in a variety of ways and that those relationships are changing. The purpose of this study is to delineate the different ways that churches and schools relate to each other, define how these historic relationships are being altered by the current context, and explore some of the most pressing challenges and opportunities that are pushing schools and churches to find new ways of relating to each other.

Theological schools and the churches: Defining traditional relationships

For two centuries most organized religious life in North America has been expressed in denominational terms. North Americans did not originate the concept of denominationalism, but they did develop and apply it in unprecedented ways. After losing direct state support, the churches had to fend for themselves within a new pay-as-you-go religious economy. They soon developed new strategies, ranging from competitive to cooperative, that enabled them to endure and prosper. Whatever their ecclesiology, all denominations functioned as voluntary societies that offered cover and support in the new context. They preserved and transmitted their traditions, blended beliefs and behaviors into robust religious ecologies, pooled resources for mission and expansion, and eventually provided a full range of goods and services to enrich and deepen their distinctive religious identities. Over time many denominations added specialized ministries like publishing houses, missionary agencies, and humanitarian programs to enhance their effectiveness and extend their reach.

The building of theological schools

They also founded schools. From the seventeenth century well into the nineteenth, Protestant denominations founded most of the colleges in North America; and in the early nineteenth century, these denominations—or smaller entities within them—began to establish separate theological schools for the training of ministers, starting with Andover in 1808.² The reasons for doing so were many. In the competitive world of free-market religion, Protestants needed a steady supply of qualified and faithful ministers who could preserve and promote their traditions in local congregations. As their denominations grew numerically, spread geographically, and became more diverse theologically, some people desired schools closer to home to meet local needs or institutions that reflected more closely their own theological convictions. New denominations did not want to rely on others for their theological education, so they founded schools of their own. In response to the surge of new immigrants in the mid- and late-nineteenth century, a number of seminaries added foreign language departments, some of which grew into separate schools to serve ethnic congregations and denominations. Not all schools were created *de novo* by ecclesiastical bodies. Some began as Bible institutes or departments of Bible or religion in existing colleges;³ in a few cases, independent religious movements or even entrepreneurial pastors and their congregations established new institutions.⁴

Roman Catholic theological education in America started in 1791, with the founding of Saint Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, and quickly developed a variety of models: Diocesan seminaries that served the needs of one or more diocese; religious order and provincial schools; "national seminaries" that trained priests from a particular national or ethnic group; and "domestic" seminaries in which local bishops gathered and supervised priests-in-training. The Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1883 sought to standardize the educational

requirements in major seminaries and raise the scholarly quality of their faculties. The founding of the Catholic University of America in 1889 supported the academic training of seminary instructors.⁵

By 1875 virtually all of the major Protestant denominations had their own theological schools. While many were still academically marginal, a growing number, especially those with ties to the newer universities, embraced the new critical scholarship. Such rising academic aspirations often produced new and controversial theological identities that provoked the starting of more schools, either in protest or in emulation.⁶

A turning point for theological education occurred in the late-1930s, when thirty-seven graduate-level theological schools in the United States and Canada formed the American Association of Theological Schools. All of these schools, with one exception, were what became known as mainline Protestant;⁷ and many of them had connections to universities. In the ensuing decades, the association sharpened its academic and institutional standards, steadily moved toward a professional model of ministerial training, and became more denominationally and theologically diverse. Starting in the 1960s, evangelical and Roman Catholic schools began joining ATS in large numbers, which dramatically changed the demographics and ethos of accredited theological education in the United States and Canada.⁸

ATS has more than 250 member schools: nearly two-thirds of these are free-standing institutions, and about one-third is either college- or university-based. In addition, four out of five ATS members identify themselves as denominational (70% Protestant, 28% Roman Catholic, and 2% Orthodox), which leaves only one in five calling itself inter- or nondenominational. As a result of such diversity, ATS schools relate to churches in a variety of ways. ATS standards recognize that many schools have multiple relationships and mandate that they carefully spell out in official documents how lines of authority and governance function in actual practice (General Institutional Standard 8). Certainly each school has its own story and its own unique way of relating to other institutions and ecclesial bodies. Thus when studying the multiform relationships between schools and churches, it is important to understand that each institution will share some things in common with other schools but retain distinctives of its own. It is beyond the scope of this study to analyze in detail all the ways that ATS schools and their supporting churches relate to each other. But it is important to recognize that significant differences do exist within the Association.

Placing schools on the governance/authority spectrum

In practice, schools are spread out along an organizational spectrum according to their governance and authority structures. At one end are schools “owned and operated” by a denominational sponsor. At the other end are schools with no official or legal ties to any religious body. Most schools exist somewhere between these extremes and function under diverse ecclesiastical relationships. Accordingly, generalizations are hard to come by; and merely labeling a school as denominational or inter/nondenominational does not explain very much about that institution’s actual relationship to churches. Com-

plicating the analysis even more is the realization that denominations are not what they used to be and that new kinds of relationships between theological schools and church bodies are already being formed.

Trustee boards. Where a school is located along the spectrum is determined by a number of factors. The most important is the fundamental issue of authority and governance, those formal relationships, legal and otherwise, that define how a school functions. For example, how are trustees selected? For some schools, all trustee appointments come through ecclesiastical channels. In some institutions, the sponsoring denominations retain the authority both to nominate and to elect trustees, while in others, the presiding bishop makes such appointments. Sometimes the makeup of the seminary board is prescribed. In the ELCA, for example, 20 percent of seminary board members are elected by the national church body, two bishops are elected from the school's supporting synods, and the remainder are elected by the synods themselves. In some denominational schools all trustees must come from the sponsoring church, while in others, a quota system ensures the sponsoring church's majority on the board, while allowing the inclusion of others.

In some cases, the trustee board must submit its nominations for new members to the church for approval. This denominational vote is often pro-forma, but some churches regularly exercise their right to turn down board nominations and substitute their own. In still other arrangements, trustee boards have the authority to elect their own members with the understanding that the sponsoring denomination will always be adequately represented, though what "adequately represented" means is left up to the individual school's board (e.g., the American Baptist Churches USA [ABCUSA]). These variations demonstrate that even in schools with the strongest denominational ties, governance and authority structures may differ significantly.

Senior administrators and faculty. Denominations can also play a major role in the selection of senior administrators and even faculty members. In some schools, ecclesiastical authorities appoint senior administrators, but in others, denominational interests are served by placing their representatives on presidential and faculty search committees. Some denominations reserve the right to vote on both senior administrators and faculty: after making it through the standard institutional search process, final nominees must also be interviewed by a separate church entity and affirmed by an official vote of the church.⁹ In most denominational schools, however, the authority for selecting both senior administrators and faculty resides in the board of trustees, which often includes denominational representatives in the search and approval process. Whatever the formal involvement of the church, most institutions establish their own criteria for the selection of administrators and faculty, which invariably includes considerations of denominational affiliation or compatibility with the sponsoring church.

Denominational support. Historically, schools connected to the denominational system experienced certain obvious benefits. Until recently, most denominations had well-established religious ecologies that functioned as a virtual feeder-system for theological education. Young people attended Sunday school and youth programs, went to summer camps and weekend

retreats, and may have gone to parochial schools or church-related colleges, all of which encouraged them to consider the ministry as vocation. Those responding to such a call were carefully guided through the church's educational and credentialing system that led to ordination. The same churches that nurtured their young people into theological schools also provided a place for them to serve after they graduated.

In addition, denominationally connected seminaries could expect a steady flow of financial support. Of course, denominations differed considerably in how much support they gave and how they provided it. Some denominations gave undesignated, direct grants to their schools, while others specified how their donations could be used. Furthermore, such money might flow from multiple sources within the denominational system: the national body, regional entities, local congregations, and individual church members. Denominations and individual congregations often supported theological schools by providing scholarships or internships. As a result, many denominational schools were essentially "kept institutions" and relied heavily on the denominational pipeline for ongoing support. As we shall see, for many schools the flow through the denominational pipeline has slowed considerably, leaving them short of students, placements, and funding.

Multiple church connections. In contrast to those institutions accountable to just one religious body, a number of ATS schools have multiple denominational connections. In her recent "Study of ATS Schools Related to Multiple Denominations," Phyllis Anderson identified four kinds of interdenominational schools: those founded to be ecumenical, those that became multid denominational through merger, those that became multid denominational in response to needs and opportunities, and those that became multid denominational (or non-denominational) after severing earlier denominational ties.¹⁰ She showed that such institutions nurture a number of complicated church relationships, both formal and informal. Sometimes these schools set aside certain trustee "seats" for particular denominations or use formal "letters of agreement" to establish working relationships with multiple denominations. Some schools support their multiple commitments by recruiting a denominationally diverse faculty or by establishing within their curriculum distinct denominational "tracks" to meet the ordination or credentialing requirements of their students. Such practices have become commonplace in many denominational schools as well, where students from other traditions sometimes outnumber those from the sponsoring church. Even nondenominational schools must develop various kinds of church relationships; and it is a rare Protestant denominational school that can operate with only one "parent." Like it or not, most denominational schools must function like interdenominational institutions, with many parents, not just one.

Accountability structures. Another factor that has shaped the traditional relationships between school and church is the existence of established accountability structures that keep schools firmly connected to their supporters. The variations here are also numerous, depending on church polity. Four examples will suffice.

The eight ELCA seminaries are overseen by the Unit on Vocation and Education, which regularly brings together seminary administrators for reflection and planning and facilitates substantive conversations with seminary faculty and administrators to ensure the effective training of ministers of Word and Sacrament. One important example of the latter was the production in 1993 of “Eleven Imperatives for Theological Education,” which became “the planning and guiding focus for the preparation of leaders for this church into the 21st century.”¹¹

The Presbyterian Church (USA) relates to its ten seminaries through the General Assembly’s Committee on Theological Education (COTE). Meeting twice a year, senior seminary administrators come together under the committee’s auspices to work on a list of issues assigned by the General Assembly or some other denominational entity. Given Presbyterian polity, COTE is where the fundamental relationship between church and school is defined and lived out. Even so, PC(USA) seminaries have independent trustee boards that stay connected to the church primarily through historic and personal ties.

In stark contrast to these systems of accountability is the “covenant relationship” that connects ten seminaries and the American Baptist Churches (ABC). In typical northern Baptist fashion, the ties that bind are not well defined and depend more on goodwill, historical memory, and personal relationships than on clearly articulated institutional structures or obligations. In fact, the only official institutional connection between the schools and the denomination is the American Baptist Association of Seminary Administrators that is called together annually by the Board of National Ministries. Such gatherings are heavy on fellowship but light on official business. In practical terms, then, ABC seminaries are led by self-perpetuating boards that are free to make covenant agreements with other denominations as well, which eight of the ten schools have done. As a result, ABC schools tend to have stronger ties with one or more of the thirty-five ABC regions, which provide more direct help in recruitment, placement, and financial support.

The Roman Catholic Church owns and operates the largest system of theological schools in North America. Katarina Schuth has identified five kinds of Catholic theological schools: those owned by one or more (arch)diocese(s), those owned and conducted by corporations, those owned by (arch)diocese(s) or religious orders and conducted by religious orders for the training of diocesan priests, those owned and conducted by religious orders for religious order students, and university-based ministry programs for lay students.¹² These schools experience high levels of accountability and institutional oversight. For example, following the 1918 *Code of Canon Law*, Catholic seminaries conformed to a traditional model of theological education: they became quasi-monastic, followed a seventeenth century view of the priesthood, and were closely tied to Rome. In the 1960s, Vatican II directed seminaries to train priests more in relation to the people they will serve. In 1971 the U.S. Bishops’ Conference developed and the Holy See approved new guidelines in the *Program of Priestly Formation* (PPF); and in 1981 Pope John Paul II mandated an apostolic visitation of all seminaries in the United States to identify strengths and weaknesses. After years of consultation, in 1993 the bishops issued the

fourth edition of the PPF, which has become the normative guide for the formation of Catholic clergy in the seminaries.¹³

Most theological schools do not relate to their sponsoring churches in such formal ways; but all schools are accountable to their supporters and must connect with churches at some level—national, regional, or local. In some cases, smaller denominations without seminaries of their own have “adopted” non-denominational schools with compatible theological and “churchly” identities; and the adopted schools have reciprocated by providing regular opportunities for communication and advice.¹⁴ A number of denominational schools have also received such unofficial recognition and have learned to make the most of it. In some ways, then, the lines that separate denominational and inter/non-denominational schools have become quite blurry. In part this is because the old denominational system has itself undergone significant transformation, and the schools find themselves facing more or less the same pressures.

The new context for theological education

In the last forty years, significant changes have occurred in both schools and churches. These changes have been well documented, and many seminary faculty and administrators now approaching retirement can recall when and how they took place. Thus the following commentary will appear to many as simply “what is,” the world in which we have been living for some time. Nevertheless, it is instructive to be reminded of how things have changed.

Charting the changes in theological schools

In the 1960s, with few exceptions, theological students were single white males, right out of college. Most studied full time, graduated on time, and intended to become ordained ministers serving local congregations. Organized religion experienced significant growth during the 1950s, and most theological educators expected the good times to continue. Their goal was to produce spiritually mature religious professionals to lead strong and growing churches.¹⁵

Student demographics. In the early twenty-first century, theological schools look very different than they did in the 1960s, especially in terms of student demographics. Women, who in the '60s were almost too few to count, currently make up 36 percent of all students in ATS schools; and in some institutions they comprise 50 percent of the total. Also scarce in the 1960s were racial/ethnic students, who now make up 38 percent of all theological students, which is comparable to the percentages found in other professional schools. (The breakdown for ATS faculty is less dramatic: 23 percent women and 17 percent racial/ethnic.) Today's theological students also tend to make up their minds about ministry and theological study much later than students in the past, *after* college graduation. As a result, two-thirds of all theological students are over the age of 30, with the largest cohort in the 40–49 age range.¹⁶ For personal and economic reasons, many of these students are part-time students, and many of them are already involved in full-time ministry. As a result, they come to seminary as experienced ministers who want to sharpen their pastoral skills and deepen their knowledge, not as novices who hope to learn the basics and enter the ministry after graduation.

In a nutshell, today's students are more diverse than they used to be, decide only after college to come to seminary, are older when they arrive, acquire more educational debt along the way,¹⁷ take longer to finish, and thus have fewer years to serve in their chosen ministries.

Expanding programs. As historical funding sources declined, many schools sought to increase revenues by developing new degree programs, including master's programs in specialized ministries, general theological studies, and the nearly ubiquitous Doctor of Ministry, which significantly helped the bottom line in many schools during the 1980s and '90s. To attract additional students, schools also employed new delivery systems: block scheduling; evening, weekend, and intensive courses; extension sites; online classes; continuing education for clergy; and nondegree certificate programs for clergy and lay people. Roman Catholic institutions saw declining numbers of seminarians somewhat offset by the arrival of lay students, many of whom were women, who wanted training in parish pastoral work to alleviate the shortage of available priests. As a result, many schools devised new mission statements to reflect these new programs and identities and had to reallocate their resources to accommodate the changes.

Today's theological schools are thus more complex than they used to be, offer more degrees than ever, often feel stretched to the limit by their expanding programs, wonder where their future students and funding will come from, and are searching for ways to cope with the changes that are occurring in their supporting churches and in the broader culture.

Growing invisibility. Despite these significant changes in programs and mission, most theological schools have become essentially unknown in their own communities. According to an Auburn Center study, "Seminaries are virtually invisible to leaders of secular organizations and institutions, even those in the seminary's own city and region." Most civic leaders do not understand what seminaries do and thus do not view them as either civic or educational assets in the community. "They are not part of the civic mix. When important decisions about social policies or community projects are at stake, seminaries and those who work in them are rarely asked to participate . . ." While there are some exceptions (mainly African American seminary presidents), most seminary personnel do not see such involvement as part of their job description and prefer to devote their energies to seminary or church-related concerns.

Evidently that strategy has not created greater visibility in church circles either. The Auburn Center study concluded that seminaries are largely invisible in their supporting churches as well: "Most of the seminaries we studied are known to only a fairly small circle of insiders of their own religious tradition—denominational executives, clergy, and the members of some congregations that are either large or located close to the seminary's campus."¹⁸ If seminaries are invisible to most churchgoers, then what does that say about the future viability of what has been the crucial relationship between theological schools and their supporting churches? Certainly, there are two sides to every relationship. If the seminaries have changed over the last forty years, the churches have changed even more.

The reshuffling of North American religion

Sometimes it is hard to believe how much organized religion in North America has changed in the last generation. In 1960 mainline Protestants believed they were true because they were big; evangelicals believed they were true because they were small; and Roman Catholics believed they had finally made it into the American mainstream with the election of JFK.

Alterations in the religious landscape. Things are different now. Mainline Protestants have been losing members and social influence since the mid-1960s, a decline that continues to the present day. Evangelicals have seen steady growth, the maturing of their institutions, and new-found political power. Roman Catholics have significantly increased their numbers but simultaneously witnessed a huge drop in mass attendance and a severe decline in the number of priests, seminarians, and religious. Recently the Church's hierarchy has lost much moral authority and credibility due to its handling of the sex scandal involving priests.¹⁹

For these and other reasons, some dramatic shifts have occurred in North American religious life. An examination of the American Religion Data Archives shows that, while there may be regional or local variations, at the national level there are now more evangelicals than mainline Protestants, more Catholics than evangelicals, and more "unclaimed" than Catholics. After nearly two hundred years of increases, in the last two decades, percentages of "religious adherence" have declined, with the greatest percentage losses occurring in the Bible Belt.²⁰ Here is the real story of the last forty years: organized religion has steadily lost ground to the "nones," those who tell pollsters that they have no religious affiliation whatsoever.²¹

New roles for organized religion. In addition to shifting patterns of religious allegiance, the role of religion in North American culture has changed considerably. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow calls this trend the "restructuring of American religion." He argues that since World War II, organized religion has been increasingly marginalized by an aggressive secular mindset, pushed out of the public square by those who think that religious convictions should be relegated to the areas of private opinion or personal preference.²² Philip Hammond and others call these changes the "third religious disestablishment." The first brought about the constitutional separation of church and state but left in place a de-facto, unofficial Protestant establishment. In the second disestablishment, which occurred in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, this Protestant hegemony gave way to the widespread conviction that Roman Catholicism and Judaism were also bona fide ways of being American. In the third disestablishment, which began in the 1960s, these dominant Judeo-Christian values were successfully challenged by aggressive notions of individualism, personal autonomy, and religious pluralism.²³ Growing numbers of people turned from traditional organized religion to embrace an amorphous and usually non-institutional spirituality or no religion at all.²⁴ Many of those who opted out of organized religion are not necessarily opposed to traditional religious beliefs. They simply reject the notion that one must belong to a church to believe them or be a good person. Reginald Bibby found similar trends in Canada, where they appeared to be more prominent and widespread than in the States.²⁵ This

reversal of fortunes has produced a spirited counterattack by those who feel excluded. The resulting conflict between traditionalists and secularists or progressives has been called a “culture war.”²⁶

Theories to explain the changes. There are many theories to explain these changes, especially the losses in mainline Protestantism. Among the most verifiable are theories about demographics and birth rates: during the 1960s many children of mainline Protestant parents left the church, and most of them never came back. Furthermore, families in the Protestant mainline tend to have fewer children, due to their higher educational and economic levels. Both observations tend to support each other: once a generation leaves the church, it is very difficult to make up the losses.

There have been other theories: some observers have blamed the decline on widespread dissatisfaction with denominational leaders who take unpopular political stands or push the church to accept controversial ideas or practices. Though popular and somewhat intuitive, that theory has not survived the scrutiny of careful research. Nevertheless, it is in the process of being tested again in light of the deep divisions within the churches over issues of theology and lifestyle, especially homosexuality. Theories with more staying power have pointed to the impact of changing social values within the culture. During the 1960s and '70s new ideas about marriage, sex, family, personal freedom, and tolerance of untraditional lifestyles gained wide acceptance among educated young people who preferred them to traditional church teachings and dropped out of church. While it is indisputable that there was a dramatic shift in social values beginning in the 1960s, the theory does not explain why those who left the church did not return when many mainline Protestants themselves adopted similar views later on.²⁷

More recent studies have focused attention back on the declining churches themselves. In a widely discussed article, “Mainline Churches: The Real Reason for Decline,” the authors noted that “the single best predictor of church participation turned out to be *belief*—orthodox Christian belief, and especially the teaching that a person can be saved only through Jesus Christ. . . . Ninety-five percent of the drop-outs who describe themselves as religious do not believe it.” These researchers argue that the real cause of mainline decline is the pervasiveness of “lay liberalism,” which the authors describe as “largely a homemade product, a kind of modern-age folk religion” that does not possess “a highly elaborated or richly developed system of thought.” Lay liberals prefer Christianity to other religions but do not base their personal preference on exclusive truth claims. They affirm the basic morality taught in all religions and believe that God speaks through the Bible, the Koran, and Buddhist sutras. In short, lay liberalism “supports honesty and other moral virtues, and it encourages tolerance and civility in a pluralistic society, but it does not inspire the kind of conviction that creates strong religious communities.”²⁸ Without strong, defining beliefs, once-strong religious ecologies begin to fall apart. Other studies have come to the same conclusions.²⁹

Similar debates have raged within Roman Catholicism. Traditionalists and progressives have squared off over the nature of church authority, clerical celibacy, the ordination of women, contraception and abortion, and the ten-

dency of North American Catholics to pick and choose, cafeteria style, among the Church's doctrines and moral teachings. Traditionalists are convinced that losses in the priesthood, religious orders, and mass attendance are the result of a lack of church discipline and the rejection of church teachings. Progressives argue the opposite: such losses stem from an overbearing hierarchy, public scandals within the church, and the unwillingness of the church's leadership to adjust to contemporary moral, intellectual, and practical realities. Such divisions are evident within Catholic theological education: seminaries support the traditional side and university-based schools of theology the progressive side.³⁰

Even evangelicals, who occasionally can be seen gloating over their current privileged place in American religion, are not beyond self-criticism and internal strife. Beneath the appearance of strength and relative invulnerability are deep fissures that divide evangelicalism's amazingly diverse constituency. Any movement that includes Southern Baptists, Pentecostals, die-hard fundamentalists, the "truly Reformed," holiness churches, racial/ethnic minorities, independents, and many members of mainline Protestantism (and Roman Catholics and Orthodox?) is bound to have some internal disagreements from time to time. Some evangelicals fret over whether their well-publicized participation in the culture war and party politics will undercut their spiritual power and the ability to reform the churches and reach the unchurched. Others resent their movement being commandeered by the political right. Some evangelical leaders chafe when they are identified as fundamentalists, while others are worried that their movement is getting soft on creeping liberalism.³¹ Increasing numbers of evangelicals are realizing that most of their present growth comes from the ranks of new immigrants and racial minorities, which is the same pattern among mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics.³²

Questions about the viability of denominations. Given the continuing difficulties in organized American religion, many have questioned the viability of the denominational system itself. Fewer members mean fewer dollars to finance denominational programs. As a result, many denominations are a shadow of their former selves. A strong trend in the broader culture—which some identify as postmodern—is the shift to decentralized power and the preference for local networks where accountability is high and involvement is more hands-on. Denominational loyalty is clearly waning in some circles, as can be seen in the prevalence of "switching" and the tendency among some to drop the denominational identifier from their church's (or theological school's) name.

One thing is certain: denominations are not the only way to organize religious life. Among the most significant developments in recent North American religion is the emergence of new church and parachurch networks. Since denominations cannot provide all the goods and services they used to, congregations are partnering with parachurch or social service ministries and each other to create their own networks for outreach and fellowship. Many churches and their leaders prefer these networks to traditional denominations because they are ad hoc and based more on fellowship and shared values than binding mutual obligations. The Willow Creek Association, for example, now numbers 10,500 congregations from ninety denominations and thirty-five countries. Its members look to Willow Creek for new directions in worship

and church life, conferences for inspiration and training, and the like. Other informal networks organize around successful pastors whose books have offered new and helpful ministry models. For instance, thousands of pastors from a variety of denominations now connect with Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in Southern California as a result of reading and implementing his best-selling *The Purpose Driven Life* and *The Purpose Driven Church*. On a smaller scale, the evangelical Leadership Network facilitates “learning communities,” “teaching churches,” and the like in order to promote creative thinking, new patterns of church life, and strategies for change. In a nutshell, the Leadership Network “commends the work of practitioners teaching other practitioners.” In many ways, such new networks perform many, but not all, of the functions of the older denominations; and growing numbers of pastors and congregations find them more helpful.

Some networks appear to be morphing into new denomination-like structures. The Calvary Chapel and Vineyard networks immediately come to mind, as does the mostly-under-the-radar New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) that includes a loose federation of modern day apostles and prophets who lead fast-growing churches that engage in spiritual warfare around the world. The NAR does not seem remotely interested in traditional theological education, but it has created its own association of unaccredited schools and training opportunities that directly support its ministry style and goals.

It may be too early to sign the death certificate for denominations. A number of recent studies have shown that instead of passing away, denominations are changing into new, more streamlined forms. As Martin Marty has observed, a look at the Yellow Pages between “chiropractors” and “cigars” demonstrates that most congregations still want to be known by their denominational connections, and many churches have decided to re-emphasize their denominational distinctives, even while they seek new ways of living out their faith commitments in what many experts call a postdenominational age.³³ The fact remains that many denominations are growing, partly because they emphasize their identities and the benefits of working together to accomplish God’s will in the world.

Signs of strength and hope. It is obvious that something significant has happened to North American religion since the middle of the twentieth century. Now evangelicals believe they are true because they are big; mainline Protestants believe they are true because they are small; and Roman Catholics are still struggling with the legacy of Vatican II and the existence of rival ecclesiologies and theologies within the Church.

Despite the continuing losses in “oldline” Protestantism, there is good news as well as bad. David Roozen has studied the trends and concluded that there are “pockets of vitality within a continuing stream of decline.” He is encouraged by the fact that the current rate of decline is about half of what it was in the 1970s and that there are a number of “adaptive practices” that have produced growth in the mainline congregations that use them. These include high intentionality (a clear purpose with an outward orientation), the use of contemporary worship, an emphasis on personal and familial spiritual practices, and multiple church-based programs to attract and hold people with a

variety of interests. Diana Butler Bass's study has identified numerous growing mainline congregations and the practices that have brought new enthusiasm, involvement, and service.³⁴

While the growing edge of organized religion currently belongs to evangelical, Pentecostal, ethnic, and independent churches, many mainline Protestant and Catholic churches are booming as well. New and often controversial models of church life are already evident. The so-called emergent church adopts a postmodern approach to church life by combining various strains of traditional and contemporary Christianity. It is often identified by its commitment to "ancient-future faith," which builds highly intensive religious communities by reclaiming ancient church identities and practices.³⁵ Another pattern can be seen in the "new paradigm" churches that combine a charismatic style with apostolic patterns of church life to do battle with hostile cosmic forces as history moves toward the Second Coming of Christ.³⁶ The megachurches continue to acquire higher percentages of North America's church-going public, and fast-growing independent churches provide even more alternatives for the "formerly denominational."³⁷

Challenges and opportunities

All of these strengths and weaknesses in contemporary religion have a direct bearing on theological education as it faces its own future. Because seminaries exist in and are dependent on this changing religious ecology, they now face a number of challenges and opportunities.

Adjusting to institutional challenges for the schools

Since the formation of separate theological schools about two hundred years ago, three questions have loomed large: where will our students come from, where will we send them once they graduate, and who is going to foot the bill for the work we do? Changes in the school/church relationship bring a new urgency to finding answers to those questions.

Student recruitment. In light of the demise of the old denominational college feeder system,³⁸ we should not be surprised by Barbara Wheeler's recent finding that "most of today's students come to theological school from a congregation rather than a campus."³⁹ Students consider the possibility of vocational ministry through the influence of pastors, family, and friends within their own religious communities, which is as it should be, many will argue. But what happens to the call to ministry when so many congregations are troubled and in decline? It is difficult to hear God's call when the congregation is conflicted, the leaders are miserable, the membership is shrinking, and the congregation's survival is in doubt. Without restored, healthy congregations, student recruitment is made more difficult. The Theological Programs for High School Youth and Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation sponsored by Lilly Endowment are helping schools and churches identify and nurture early recruits. But such efforts will not amount to much in the long run without the existence of robust religious communities to support the process. Complicating such recruiting efforts is the fact that, in general, semi-

naries have a difficult time competing with other professional schools—such as those for law and medicine—for the best and brightest students.

Placement issues. In the past, many new seminary graduates found their first appointment in a “starter congregation,” usually a small congregation with limited resources. These churches are relatively easy to find because about 70 percent of all Protestant congregations in America have fewer than a hundred in Sunday attendance. Historically, such congregations were able to pay a starting wage and expected to see young pastors come and go. But many of these smaller congregations are no longer able to afford a full-time ordained pastor, since at present most seminary graduates are second career people with a family, a mortgage, and a large student loan to repay. As a result, many denominations report large numbers of empty pulpits and no easy way to fill them.⁴⁰ Experts argue over whether there is a real shortage of pastors or just a distribution problem.⁴¹ According to the ELCA bishop of the Indiana-Kentucky synod, “if we could distribute our clergy, we’d have enough. But distribution is a problem because of where folks need to locate.” A United Methodist official observed that “We don’t have a shortage of pastors; we have a shortage of seminary graduates who are going into pastoral ministry.”⁴²

A recent study supports such an observation, concluding that fewer theological students than before enter seminary intending to pursue the ordained ministry: “Though 80 percent say that their goal is a ‘religious’ profession or occupation, fewer (60%) plan to be ordained, and ministry in a congregation or parish is the primary goal of less than one-third of students.”⁴³ Today’s students have many other nonpastoral ministry options: counseling, chaplaincy, youth and family ministry, teaching, social service, administration, and the like.

Of course, not all congregations or denominations report pastor shortages. There is no apparent placement problem for suburban or urban congregations, only in the smaller and rural churches. In the last analysis, the most serious shortage is in the area of church membership. Shrinking congregations have a hard time finding or affording pastoral leadership; growing ones do not.⁴⁴ As we shall see, because of these placement (or shortage?) problems, many denominations have developed alternatives that have far-reaching consequences for theological schools.

Funding problems. Because of their own difficulties, many denominational bodies have had to reduce their funding for theological education; and nobody should expect them to restore the lost funding any time soon. Even when denominations have been able to maintain old giving levels, their funding covers a smaller percentage of expanding seminary budgets. As a result, many denominational schools no longer qualify as “kept institutions” and wonder why their sponsoring denominations should retain the same level of control when they provide reduced levels of financial support. In his study on the financing of theological schools, Tony Ruger stated the obvious conclusion: “leaders of denominational seminaries must engage their sponsoring church bodies in serious conversations about the shape of a mission partnership in which financial support will play a smaller role.”⁴⁵

The attrition of denominational funding has left many schools in an extremely difficult financial situation. Most theological schools do not have siz-

able endowments; many are burdened by older campus facilities with crushing deferred maintenance costs; probably most are becoming increasingly invisible to potential donors; and few can realistically expect new income from increasing the size of their student body or adding new degree programs, even if they could afford to establish them. Many senior administrators and trustees have crunched the numbers and have serious doubts about the long-term financial viability of their institutions. It is now common in ATS circles to hear leaders openly speculate that in the next decade or two a significant number of member schools will close their doors for financial reasons. Without new funding sources or the drastic cutting of operational expenses, many schools will not survive.

Changing views of the ministry and alternate paths to ordination. Equally serious for theological schools are changing concepts of the ministry. For decades many denominations worked hard to develop and improve their ordination standards. This was true especially in the so-called connectional churches that required seminary degrees for ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Segments of the “free-church tradition” also sought to raise standards, even when they stopped short of mandating educational requirements for ordination. The desire for an educated (or professional) ministry was one of the great goals and achievements of the denominational system and the driving force behind the creation of The Association of Theological Schools.

For a number of reasons, many of the same churches that insisted on an educated and ordered ministry have recently developed alternate paths to ordination that do not require a seminary degree. The reasons are practical and telling: as stated above, many small and struggling congregations are unable to acquire a seminary-trained and ordained pastor, so alternatives are necessary. Virtually all mainline Protestant denominations have developed or are in the process of developing such programs, many of which do not even require candidates to have a college degree, let alone a seminary degree. United Methodists have their Course of Study for training “local pastors,” who are not given the same standing or privileges as regularly ordained Methodist clergy. Presbyterians (PCUSA) have a program for “commissioned lay pastors.” The Evangelical Lutherans have an ad hoc system for designating a “program of study” for identified “indigenous leaders” that can lead to regular ordination in the church. Episcopalians also have a nonseminary path to ordination for “Canon IX clergy.” In the summer of 2005, the United Church of Christ endorsed for the first time “multiple paths of preparation” for ordination, most of which do not require a seminary degree. American Baptist regional leaders have developed a three-path system leading to ordination, only one of which includes going to seminary. The irony is that while some denominations are altering their ordination requirements away from seminary education, other religious groups are moving in the opposite direction (e.g., some Pentecostals, African Americans, and other ethnic groups).

Historians will suggest that there is nothing new about these alternative paths to ordination. In fact, before seminaries were founded, such alternatives were the standard way of training ministers. In colonial times, the typical pattern for Congregationalist and Presbyterian ministers was to earn a college de-

gree in the liberal arts, remain on campus to “read divinity” for an additional year under the guidance of the college president (who was invariably a member of the clergy), then apprentice under a local pastor for another two or three years before being ordained. Where colleges were not available, they made do with local academies or “log cabin colleges” where ministry candidates studied with an accomplished pastor in the mornings, worked on the farm to earn their keep in the afternoons, and developed ministry skills by working in churches on the weekends, all under the careful supervision of their presbyteries or associations. In the early days of American Methodism, when the main model for ministry was itinerancy, ministers-in-training worked their way through a prescribed reading list and were quizzed regularly by their district superintendent or bishop to determine their progress and levels of understanding. Along the way they were carefully mentored in the ministerial arts and their spiritual unction to preach and lead effectively. This “course of study” approach remained the preferred way of training Methodist clergy well into the nineteenth century. Many Baptists wanted their ministers to have a college degree, but most were willing to settle for much less most of the time.

Slowly these patterns of ministerial formation changed. The separation of church and state, the shortage of pastors due to the successes of the Second Great Awakening, and the increasing status of the churches in American culture altered common perceptions of the Christian ministry and the methods required to train ministers. The trend was clearly toward a better educated and even professional ministry, despite the often-voiced concern that intellectual attainment and professional credentials threatened to take the place of a divine calling and gifting for ministry.⁴⁶

Of course, that was then, and this is now. Alternate paths to ordination existed in the past because new churches needed pastors to lead them, and opportunities for a more sophisticated ministry education were few and far between. Today the needs that drive the re-adoption of these alternates are quite different. Theological schools abound, but denominations with shrinking memberships are unable to find enough ordained seminary graduates to serve in their smaller and often distressed congregations. But that is hardly the whole story: many evangelical and free-church denominations developed theological schools without eliminating their multiple-path approaches to religious leadership. The holiness and Pentecostal traditions have never required seminary education for ordination. For example, the Church of the Nazarene and the Assemblies of God provide many educational pathways to ordination, including college, Bible institutes, and variations on the old Methodist “course of study.” Nazarenes and members of the Assemblies consider seminary education as the alternative, not the main or even preferred, path to ordination. Likewise, many evangelical Baptists leave the question of educational preparation for ministry up to local congregations to decide. The same patterns hold in many independent churches, where hands-on ministry experience, proven interpersonal and communication skills, and a recognized call by God supersede academic and professional credentialing.

Do these alternative programs constitute a deprofessionalization of the ministry and a lowering of ordination standards? Many (most?) seminary per-

sonnel would say so. But then they do not get to decide ordination requirements; the churches do. In contrast to the legal and medical professions, the ministry is an unregulated industry. Each denomination (and in some cases, individual congregation) makes up its own rules. For ministry candidates, there is nothing equivalent to the state bar exam or medical boards. Unlike law and medical schools, seminaries do not prepare their students to meet industrywide professional and educational standards, only those defined by their supporting church(es). Certainly schools can aim higher if they so choose, but market forces beyond their control will pull in other directions.

For that reason alone, seminaries should not be surprised when churches change their ordination requirements, even though such changes are bound to have a profound impact on theological schools. It is difficult to predict the long-term results of these alternate paths on theological education: will they work against MDiv programs? Results will undoubtedly vary.

Alternate education for effective church leadership. Regardless of whether one thinks such changes are justified or wise, it is clear that growing numbers of religious leaders no longer believe that a seminary education is necessary for effective church leadership. In fact, many are arguing that pastoral leaders are better off without it. Such views have been common in some fundamentalist, evangelical, and Pentecostal groups for a long time. But now there seems to be research to prove that it is so. In 2001 the Hartford Institute for Religion Research conducted an ambitious project that surveyed people in more than 14,000 congregations from forty-one denominations. The final report contained some deeply disturbing findings about the impact of seminary education on church life and leadership. On the positive side it observed that seminary training leads to better sermon preparation and delivery and more involvement in ecumenical worship and social ministries. But seminary education also has a negative impact on basic religious and community values. Nonseminary trained pastors are more likely to be leading churches that are "vital and alive, growing in members, using contemporary worship, clear about purpose and mission, and well organized." In an obvious understatement, the researchers concluded that "these findings would suggest the need for a careful review of the educational process of leadership preparation."⁴⁷

For those who believe that seminary education is bad for the health of local churches, there are plenty of alternatives. Clearly, theological schools no longer corner the market on the training of religious leaders. A number of megachurches have become "teaching churches" that offer church-based theological education for lay people and continuing education for pastors. Willow Creek Community Church sponsors a number of annual conferences and training sessions that attract thousands of participants. Other nondenominational parachurch organizations put on nationally advertised conferences on various themes to help ministers and lay leaders. Thanks to the Internet, online courses and theological degree programs (often offered by unaccredited institutions) are now available at the click of a mouse. Academic resources that used to be available only in well-equipped theological libraries are now readily available on CDs or online. Educational materials for pastoral ministry are now accessible to everyone with a computer anytime and anywhere in

the world. In short, large parts of the theological education market have been “globalized.” To paraphrase the title and main point of Thomas Friedman’s recent best seller, thanks to technology and the explosion of educational resources, the world of theological education is flat.⁴⁸

Of course, defenders of graduate theological education will insist that such on-demand ministerial training does not measure up to their offerings; and it is difficult to argue with such an assessment. Now more than ever, ministerial students need the time and guided reflection to acquire the knowledge and discernment to become effective leaders of religious communities. One simply cannot attain such things in short spurts or weekend exposures. Face-to-face encounters in ongoing scholarly communities are still the best way to prepare leaders in changing and difficult times. That much seems both self-evident and provable to seminary administrators, faculty, and alumni who look back on their theological education with gratitude and appreciation.

But such notions are far from universal. Many critics insist that theological schools are not producing the kinds of pastors lay people want. While lay people say they want well-educated and theologically informed pastors, they also desire leaders who have interpersonal and communication skills, the ability to lead a complex organization and handle conflict management, and the personal resources and stamina to guide the congregation through the tough process of spiritual and institutional renewal.⁴⁹ Increasingly, result-oriented churches want to hire pastors who “know *what* to do and *how* to do it,” regardless of their educational backgrounds or denominational credentials.⁵⁰

A common complaint is that seminaries are not producing such well-balanced and multitasked ministers because their faculties are more interested in scholarship than in matters of faith or practical ministry. A recent Auburn Center study of theological faculties paints a much more complicated picture. While personal religious adherence and leadership in worship and church life by faculty remain high, in the last decade, seminary faculty and those in doctoral programs preparing for teaching in theological schools are less likely to be ordained ministers and more likely to describe their own field as religious studies rather than theological studies. Some observers see such trends as potentially harmful to the curriculum’s focus on ministerial formation; but not all analysts agree. Possibly more significant is the way seminary faculties understand their own role and priorities in the educational process. Faculties in evangelical schools tend to emphasize content, the integration of academic and ministry studies, and spiritual formation and see themselves as representatives of a particular religious tradition. Mainline Protestant faculties tend to emphasize critical and theological thinking and see themselves as representatives of particular academic disciplines. Roman Catholic faculties seek to balance their teaching and research roles and to integrate the academic, ministerial, and formational parts of the curriculum.⁵¹ The study was correct to conclude that “theological schools’ faculties are one of the greatest strengths of the theological schools” and to voice concern about their growing tendency to “privilege the study of religion and marginalize theological commitments.”⁵² Such observations underscore the concerns of many rank-and-file lay people and church leaders who have already started to look elsewhere for their pastors.

The slow pace of institutional change. Theological schools like to see themselves as agents of prophetic change; but institutionally most of them are quite conservative and resist significant change. “The structures, work patterns, and operating values of theological schools are anchored in tradition and continuity. In most instances, they remain the same for long periods or change very, very slowly.”⁵³ This means that most theological schools will find it difficult to adjust to the new religious ecology in which they live. A comparison of the new religious networks and theological schools is quite instructive. Networks are about change, quick response, creative alternatives, new models, and the like. In comparison, theological schools are slow and measured in the face of new developments and reticent to embrace too much innovation too soon, thanks in large part to deeply embedded values of shared governance, which to movers-and-shakers can appear glacial and cumbersome. A case in point: with much good faith and intentionality, theological schools committed themselves to greater racial and gender diversity decades ago, but the pace of change has been painfully slow. Theological schools are about “a long obedience in the same direction,”⁵⁴ while the new religious networks are about quick response. Unfortunately, many seminaries do not have much time to warm up to the new environment.

In his recent book, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, Jared Diamond explains why even complex groups fail to respond to problems that eventually do them in. The reasons are many. One group fails to anticipate an approaching problem and is quickly overwhelmed by it when it arrives. Another group sees the problem coming but fails to diagnose it properly because it lacks the necessary technical skills or competent leadership to do so. Still another group understands the nature of the problem well enough but does not even try to solve it because of internal conflicts of interest, ideological thinking that refuses to challenge old convictions, assumptions, or ways of doing things, or simple psychological denial. Finally, a group may sincerely try to address the problem but fail because the solution is way beyond its present capability or resources.⁵⁵

Fortunately, theological schools have proven themselves to be quite resilient institutions; but it is not difficult to imagine how at least some schools might fail to address the challenges facing them for the reasons listed above. A few seminaries may already resonate with the opening line of Woody Allen’s often-quoted commencement address: “More than any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly.”⁵⁶ Most schools are a long way from Allen’s fork in the road and still have time to make constructive adjustments. But time is on nobody’s side in the long run.

Opportunities for the development of new partnerships

What follows are suggestions or possibilities, not well-thought-out proposals, since the purpose of this project is to encourage members of the Association to discover solutions through a collaborative process. Hopefully, these suggestions may point the conversation in fruitful directions.

Finding new ways to relate to each other. Schools and churches already relate to each other at various levels. Most schools work closely with local congregations through their field education or internship programs. But some schools have involved pastors and lay leaders in new mentoring programs for their students. Denver Seminary, for example, has more than 1,000 “certified” church-based mentors who join with faculty in helping students set academic, ministerial, and spiritual goals, then evaluate their progress. Such a collaborative approach to mentoring not only helps students integrate academic and ministry studies but also creates strong relationships of loyalty and support within existing church communities, which, given the changes in older denominational support, may be essential to the survival of many schools. According to Lynn and Wheeler, “More and more, students and financial support will be drawn from churches and individuals who know the school firsthand, often because they are nearby. . . even if they are not members of your immediate religious family.”⁵⁷ Discovering and intensifying such relationships are going to be more important than ever before.

In addition, it might be possible for some theological schools to partner with those “teaching churches” whose human and financial resources are substantial. Some seminaries have already started to offer regular courses in conjunction with conferences and other events sponsored by such churches. As participating schools have discovered, teaching churches possess significant expertise and workable models that can contribute significantly to the training of effective leaders. Possibly other churches without the same kinds of resources could be included as well. Into these new partnerships schools can bring their gifts of discernment, theological analysis, and the perspective that comes with the serious study of Scripture, tradition, theology, ethics, and the like.

Most important, schools and churches can collaborate in setting (and carrying out) the educational and formational agenda for ministerial students. Most faculties and administrators in theological schools would profit greatly by regularly listening to pastors talk about their work. If seminaries are really interested in discovering what transformational leadership means in local congregations, all they have to do is ask the men and women who have demonstrated such giftedness. Chances are good they know. Of course, both sides will have to take each other seriously and work hard to alleviate some of the disconnects that currently keep churches and schools apart.

Supporting the mission of local churches. According to the conventional wisdom of the 1960s and '70s, the minister's job was to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. Such advice made sense when so many congregations were “fat and sassy” and enjoying the benefits of social privilege and ample resources. Today the situation is different, with an abundance of fragile and struggling congregations that seem to lack the human and spiritual resources to succeed. What can seminaries do to promote the revitalization and renewal of such churches? How can they help their students become more effective leaders for change? It is not unreasonable to ask another tough question: What were the seminaries and their graduates doing while so many denominations and congregations were suffering from a lack of mission, unclear identity, or public scandal?

Of course, that last question might imply that theological schools somehow exist above or outside the prevailing religious ecology. The real relationship between school and church is always reciprocal: under the best conditions, schools shape the religious ecology and are shaped by it. No theological school, especially those with denominational ties, can expect to fly above the storm when the winds of controversy blow hard. It works both ways: as the seminaries go, so go the churches; and as the churches go, so go the seminaries.

One promising approach in helping churches is the application of missiology to North American church life. Missional churches and their leaders seek to understand how best to engage and evangelize unchurched people in a culture that no longer privileges organized religion or the Christian faith. In short, to be effective, ministers in the current North American religious landscape need to know how to move beyond the mindset and practices of “Christendom” in order to think and act like cross-cultural missionaries. Such ministers are able to analyze their context and develop theologically informed and culturally relevant strategies to reach it. This missional approach will actively challenge the effects of “lay liberalism” and replace it with a clear and compelling articulation of the Christian gospel.⁵⁸ No seminary can effectively educate missional leaders without being missional itself. The commitment to local church ministry will have to permeate all parts of the curriculum, not just the ministry courses. Thus an important question: can the training or orientation of current or future theological faculties support such a missional emphasis?

Rethinking the mission of theological schools. Possibly the biggest issue facing theological schools is the question of their own mission. To use the language of the marketplace: what business are theological schools in? Do they exist to provide professional education for ordained clergy and theological scholars; or are they in the business of providing theological education for the church? In light of the changing religious ecology, can theological schools afford to maintain their mission of educating professional ministers much longer?

If schools decide in favor of the second alternative, they will need to adjust their missions, programs, and resources to include other emphases: lay and continuing education, nondegree certificate programs, and short-term programs to meet special needs. Here ATS will need to help its member schools find ways to react strategically and quickly to new opportunities, to act more like members of a network than typical educational bureaucracies. Without the ability to think and move fast, many schools will find opportunities passing them by. For example, there is the fast approaching wave of baby boomer retirees who will have the time and the means to devote to lay ministry; and there will be many opportunities to contribute to alternative paths to ordination if schools can respond quickly enough with new kinds of delivery systems. For Roman Catholics, seminaries need to add to their primary task of priestly formation the task of developing new programs to support the credentialing of parish directors and pastoral associates who are now carrying most of the pastoral load in local parishes. Up to now, most of that work has been done by Catholic colleges and universities. Such changes would demonstrate the commitment of theological schools to assist local church ministry in new and creative ways.

Recognizing reasons to change. Making such institutional changes will require the support of seminary faculty, many of whom already feel stretched to the limit. As a result, proposals for developing new partnerships or reconfiguring resources and programs may not be welcome or even seem remotely possible. Like it or not, faculties are usually not willing to consider such change unless there is an overwhelming and unavoidable reason to do so. Without a sense of impending crisis, most seminary personnel prefer to stand pat.

Such reticence is not unreasonable given the fact that senior administrators and trustees come and go, but faculties tend to endure forever. No one has more at stake in preserving and defending the institutional culture than those who have to live in it over the long haul. Nevertheless, the faculty's view of the institution often is narrowly focused and does not include all the elements needed to plot a future course of action. Such matters usually fall to senior administrators and trustees. The situation calls for collaboration.

One of the most difficult tasks for trustees, administrators, and faculty is agreeing on the nature of reality. What is really going on here? What is the nature of the problems we face? What's the relationship between external and internal challenges? What strategies are most appropriate, given who we are and the resources that are available to us? Which core values are *really* non-negotiable and which might be expendable to ensure the future? Unless the seminary's crucial "stakeholders" can arrive at similar answers to these questions, progress will be impossible.

Maybe this is the best place to start: by doing a sophisticated assessment about where one's school fits in the current religious environment. Each school is different; no two schools have the same history, resources, or constituency. Some schools are already on the edge of the abyss and will have to take drastic action to survive (merge with another institution, sell parts or all of their current campus to reduce expenses, or adopt other draconian measures), while others, thanks be to God, cannot even see the abyss from their present location. Even so, it will be difficult and dangerous to ignore the present challenges for long.

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ENDNOTES

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5. John Tracy Ellis, *Essays in Seminary Education* (Notre Dame, IN: Fides Publishers, 1967), 59–223. Joseph M. O’Keefe, *Catholic Education at the Turn of the New Century*, reprint ed. (New York, NY: Garland Press, 1997).
6. Conrad Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995); William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1982); George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925*, reprint ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1982).
7. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was the only charter member of ATS that would not currently fit the “mainline” description.
8. From 1960 to 1990, 105 schools became members of ATS: twenty were mainline Protestant, forty-seven were Roman Catholic, and thirty-eight were evangelical. See Jesse H. Ziegler, *ATS Through Two Decades: Reflections on Theological Education, 1960–1980* (Vandalia, OH: The Association of Theological Schools, 1984). See also Timothy P. Weber, “New Dimensions in American Evangelical Theology: The Mainstreaming of Evangelical Theological Education,” *New Dimensions in Evangelical Thought: Essays in Honor of Millard J. Erickson*, David S. Dockery, ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 148–183.
9. A number of evangelical denominations follow this practice as a way to maintain the church’s doctrine and ethos. One such example is North Park Theological Seminary of the Evangelical Covenant Church. After going through the school-run search process, the presidential candidate must be voted on by delegates at the church’s annual meeting; and, after going through the standard faculty-led search process, all regular, tenure track faculty nominees must be interviewed by the ECC’s Board of the Ordered Ministry, affirmed by the Ministerium (comprised of all ordained Covenant clergy), and voted on at the annual meeting. Even non-Covenant faculty candidates must go through this process.
10. Phyllis Anderson, “Report of Study of ATS Schools Related to Multiple Denominations,” January 5, 2005.
11. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, “Eleven Imperatives for Theological Education” (Chicago, IL: ELCA, 1993).
12. Katarina Schuth, *Seminaries, Theologates, and the Future of Church Ministry: An Analysis of Trends and Transitions* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 245–248.
13. Ibid. See also 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).
14. For example, George Fox Evangelical Seminary is recognized by four denominations (Evangelical Church of North America, Evangelical Friends, Free Methodist Church, and Wesleyan Methodist Church) even though it is officially nondenominational. The Haggard School of Theology at Azusa Pacific University has similar connections with a number of Quaker and Wesleyan/holiness denominations.
15. An optimistic, professional model of ministry is clearly evident in two significant mid-twentieth century studies: H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and its Ministry: Reflections on the Aims of Theological Education* (New York, NY: Harper, 1956), and H. Richard Niebuhr, Daniel Day Williams, and James M. Gustafson, *The Advancement of Theological Education* (New York, NY: Harper, 1957).
16. Most of the statistics in this section are from ATS’s 2004–2005 Annual Data Tables.

17. Anthony Ruger and Barbara G. Wheeler, *Manna from Heaven? Theological and Rabbinical Student Debt*, Auburn Studies, no. 3 (New York, NY: Auburn Theological Seminary, April 1995).
18. On the “invisibility” of theological schools, see Elizabeth Lynn and Barbara G. Wheeler, *Missing Connections: Public Perceptions of Theological Education and Religious Leadership*, Auburn Studies, no. 6 (New York, NY: Auburn Theological Seminary, September 1999), 4–5.
19. Peter Steinfels, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2003).
20. Compare Martin Bradley, et al., *Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1990* (Atlanta, GA: Glenmary Research Center, 1992) and Dale Jones, et al., *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States 2000* (Atlanta, GA: Glenmary Research Center, 2002).
21. See *American Religion Data Archives*, Religious Congregations and Memberships Maps and Reports, www.thearda.com.
22. Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).
23. Philip Hammond, *Religion and Personal Autonomy: The Third Disestablishment in America* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1992). See also Robert N. Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985).
24. Elizabeth Lesser, *The New American Spirituality: A Seeker’s Guide* (New York, NY: Random House, 1999) and Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).
25. Reginald W. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto, ON: Stoddart, 1990). More recently he has found the beginnings of a reversal of some of these trends: *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada* (Toronto, ON: Stoddart, 2002). For comparative historical studies of American and Canadian religion, see Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992); and Robert T. Handy, *A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1977).
26. James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, reprint ed. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1992); James Davison Hunter and Alan Wolfe, *Is There a Culture War? A Dialogue on Values and American Public Life* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2006); Robert Wuthnow, *The Struggle for America’s Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989). For an alternative view, especially in the area of politics, see Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Longman Publishing Group, 2005).
27. For a good survey of various decline theories, see Dean R. Hoge, “Why Are Churches Declining?” *Theology Today* 36, no. 1 (April 1979): 92–95, also available online at <http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/apr1979/v36-1-criticscorner5.htm>.
28. Benton Johnson, Dean R. Hoge, and Donald A. Luidens, “Mainline Churches: The Real Reason for Decline,” *First Things*, 31 (March 1993):13–18.
29. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks, eds., *The Mainstream Protestant “Decline”: The Presbyterian Pattern* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press,

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31. The literature on evangelical religion is voluminous. Here is a sampling. D.G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004); George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991); Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Mark A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001); Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005); and Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

32. This observation comes from Edith Blumhofer, director of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, Wheaton College, March 17, 2006.

33. Nancy T. Ammerman, "New life for denominationalism," *The Christian Century*, March 15, 2000, also available at http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/ammerman_article3.html. See also Adair T. Lummis, "Brand Name Identity in a Post-Denominational Age: Regional Leaders' Perspectives on Its Importance for Churches" (paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Columbus, Ohio, October 2001) also available online at http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/lummis_article1.html.

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35. See Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003); Leonard Sweet, gen. ed., *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003); Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999); and Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

36. Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

37. Scott Thumma, "What God Makes Free is Free Indeed: Nondenominational Church Identity and its Networks of Support," Hartford Institute for Religion Research, October 1999, accessible online at http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/thumma_article5.html.

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See also Scott Thummas and Dave Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn from America's Largest Churches* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

38. James T. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998). For a study of surviving "feeder schools," see Robert Benne, *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001).

39. Barbara G. Wheeler, *Is There a Problem? Theological Students and Religious Leadership for the Future*, Auburn Studies, no. 8 (New York, NY: Auburn Theological Seminary, July 2001), 3.

40. A number of articles in the April 4, 2004, issue of the *Courier-Journal* of Louisville, Kentucky, provided the following statistics: Within the PCUSA, one in three congregations (i.e., 4,000 parishes) is without a full-time ordained pastor; one out of five congregations in Reformed Church of America and the ELCA congregations is without permanent pastoral leadership; and one out of ten of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod's 6,000 congregations is without a full-time ordained pastor.

41. Patricia M. Y. Chang, "Assessing the Clergy Supply in the 21st Century," *Pulpit & Pew Research Reports* (Durham, NC: Duke Divinity School, 2004).

42. Quotations are from "Empty Pulpits: Ranks of Pastors Dwindling," *Courier-Journal*, April 4, 2004.

43. Wheeler, *Is There A Problem?*, 3.

44. "Empty Pulpits," *Courier-Journal*.

45. Anthony Ruger, *Lean Years Fat Years: Changes in the Financial Support of Protestant Theological Education*, Auburn Studies, no. 2 (New York, NY: Auburn Theological Seminary, December 1994), 3. See also Anthony Ruger, *Seek and Find? Revenues in Theological Education*, Auburn Studies, no. 11 (New York, NY: Auburn Theological Seminary, April 2005).

46. Fraser, *Schooling the Preachers*. Donald M. Scott, *From Office to Profession: The New England Ministry, 1750–1850* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978).

47. Carl S. Dudley and David A. Roozen, *Faith Communities Today: A Report on Religion in the United States Today* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Seminary, March 2001).

48. Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

49. Adair T. Lummis, "What Do Lay People Want in Pastors? Answers from Lay Search Committee Chairs and Regional Judicatory Leaders," *Pulpit and Pew Research Reports* (Durham, NC: Duke Divinity School, 2003). See also Carl S. Dudley and David A. Roozen, *Faith Communities Today* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2001) for an examination of similar issues.

50. In March 2006, the ATS task force working on this project listened to a gathering of successful mainline Protestant, Pentecostal, evangelical, and Roman Catholic pastors reflecting on these issues. A number of the pastors admitted to hiring experienced and result-oriented ministers from other traditions or acting outside of normal denominational procedures to ordain qualified lay ministers who had proven themselves to be effective church leaders.

51. Barbara G. Wheeler, Sharon L. Miller, and Katarina Schuth, *Signs of the Times: Present and Future Theological Faculty*, Auburn Studies, no. 10 (New York, NY: Auburn Theological Seminary, February 2005).

52. Ibid., 25, 26.
53. Ibid., 4.
54. The phrase is taken from Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, 20th anniversary ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).
55. Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2005), 419–440.
56. Woody Allen, “My Speech to the Graduates,” *Side Effects* (NY: Ballantine Books, 1980), 79–85.
57. Lynn and Wheeler, *Missing Connections*, 22.
58. Especially helpful on the “missional church” are Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998); Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000); George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, eds., *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996); Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997).

Recommendations of the Task Force of the Theological Schools and the Church Project

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At the conclusion of the project, task force members generated recommendations for theological schools and churches along with recommendations for both the Association and the Commission. Task force members suggest the conversations they began need to continue beyond the project's conclusion and that all parties involved engage in new and creative ways.

Recommendations for theological schools and churches

The task force concluded that both the church and theological schools are in a period of significant change, and the way in which theological schools relate to their ecclesial constituents requires urgent attention.

- The relationship between theological schools and their ecclesial constituents urgently needs continued conversation and dialogue. The dialogue needs to occur both between the church and the school and within the academy and the church.

The historic ties of theological schools to their ecclesial communities have in many instances come under pressure. Churches often have less money with which to support theological education, and schools have often tended to look more to the academy than to church leaders for support. If theological education is cut off from the church, it loses its *'raison d'être.'* Both church and schools need to be deliberate about making sure that their mutual conversation takes place.

We are in such a period of change that past assumptions may no longer be valid. For the relationship to continue, the dialogue must be constantly tended. What is at risk is the diminishing of the relationship. Should this occur, most schools of theological education will no longer have churches that will send students or hire graduates; the donor base will weaken; and soon the seminary will have lost its reason for being and/or its ability to continue.

- While the conversation will attend to the current situation, it must not be limited to the present because so much is changing so rapidly.

Life as we knew it has changed, our world is different, and the pace of change in our North American culture is constantly accelerating. For the church to be a vital part of these changing communities, the church

will have to be attentive. Too often our dialogue continues on outmoded assumptions about the needs of pastoral leadership in the church and how to prepare it. Yet just being attentive to the present is not enough. For that will leave us constantly behind, always just missing the next era of young Christians. Thus, careful analysis of present needs as well as the attempt to predict future needs is called for.

- These changes will require theological schools to alter many of the ways in which they serve the church, and these changes need to occur sooner rather than later. The timing and pace of change is a crucial factor.

We are at the “tipping point.” The pace of change is so rapid that schools run the danger of preparing students for a ministry that no longer meets the needs of the church. If we are not attentive now, the opportunities diminish for preparing leaders for the future of Christ’s ministry. With this in mind, schools must be open to change in how they prepare students for pastoral work; they must train students to expect and be able to work with change throughout their ministry.

The task force found that its conversations, as well as the conversations it sponsored among pastors, denominational leaders, and theological educators, were of such value that ATS and the schools should seek ways to continue this conversation.

- Schools should engage in direct conversations with laypersons and church professionals who are active in churches as well as finding ways to have conversations with persons who have little or no church involvement to learn about the changing realities in congregations and beyond.

Conversations with varieties of leaders and pastors are certainly very important. However, if we are only in conversation with those who are currently in leadership, we may be speaking with those who have too much at stake to consider other realities. We must also be in conversation with those who sit in the pew as well as those on the edges of the church, those with a yearning to be part of God’s people but not willing to be part of what they currently identify as “church.”

- Schools should undertake faculty immersion experiences in congregations and engage processes by which faculty can learn about issues in both congregational life and ministerial leadership.

Almost all of our faculty members are active in the life of a congregation, yet fewer and fewer of them have had the responsibility of a pastor, or such experience is so far in the past it does not equate with the present needs of the church. This is not the fault of the faculty member, as theological schools expect such expertise of them that there is little time to accept other responsibilities. Speaking on weekends and preaching here and there are not the same as serving as a pastor of a congregation. Therefore, our faculty are teaching for a vocation that is not their own. To the best

of our ability, theological schools should work to find ways to immerse faculty members in the responsibilities and realities of pastoral ministry.

- Schools should bring together faculty, administrators, board members, pastoral search committee chairs, or church officials responsible for assigning pastoral candidates to develop recommendations regarding pastoral preparation that need attention by the seminary and by the church.

Theological schools need to hear from those who are receiving our graduates, those who are looking for pastors and leaders. What talents, education, and experience are needed in pastoral leaders today? Are the right candidates attending seminary? When students graduate, are they prepared to meet the present needs of the church? Such conversations may help theological schools avoid preparing pastors and leaders for a world that no longer exists and help them provide graduates for the changing needs of the church.

Recommendations for the Association and the Commission

The task force proposed a number of initiatives or strategies that ATS or the Commission on Accrediting should pursue to support theological schools and the church as they both move through these changes.

The Association should:

- Support the changes that need to be made through existing structures such as leadership education events and faculty development programming.

ATS also needs to listen in on these church/theological school conversations to be able to assist the schools to make the necessary changes in pastoral education.

- Identify schools that are doing innovative work and hold up the successful work as ideas and models for other schools. ATS should find ways to reward publicly the kind of innovation that will serve the future of the schools and the church.

Many schools are already doing pioneering work in new programs and using new pedagogical methods. ATS is uniquely situated to be able, through its accrediting process, to learn about such groundbreaking approaches to theological education.

- Create incentives for theological schools to acknowledge and reward research, writing, publications, etc., that address ecclesial concerns and the well-being of the church.

Making such research, writing, and publication an expectation of all faculty members would be an important step for schools to consider.

- Find ways to support research and writing that address various kinds of pastoral intelligences and what they mean for issues of admission and goals of educational programs.

We have incentives for faculty members to excel in their fields of expertise; perhaps we could give faculty members incentives to excel in developing the pastoral intelligences.

- Develop educational resources that schools could use about the church, its needs, and its changing character.
Assist the study of ecclesiology to have a down-to-earth and practical aspect that looks at the church today and its development into the future.

The Commission on Accrediting should:

- Consider changes to the standards in its 2008–2012 revision process that would emphasize the church-related mission of theological schools. The vitality of the church is not incidental to the life of the seminary, and the standards should foster the expectation that theological schools, as appropriate, should advance the work of congregations and ecclesial bodies.

While this presumption already exists, we have not held theological schools accountable for the vitality of the church. Many theological schools find themselves more the church's critic rather than taking on some responsibility for the church's health. How might standards support a mutually supportive role of church and school?

- Consider the ways in which shared governance in theological schools can be conducive or nonconductive to needed change.

Shared governance can be interpreted more than one way. Shared governance can be imagined as bringing everyone to the table for each decision. Or, shared governance can be imagined as parceling out the various tasks in order to share the load. While active communication will generally strengthen creativity and problem solving, spending most of our time around the table may hinder critical tasks from getting done. At this moment, we do not have the luxury of wasting time!

- Consider assessing the school's interactions with the church in addition to assessing student learning.

While theological schools have generally thought of themselves as being accountable to the church, assessing that accountability is crucial.

Faith Rohrbough, retired president of Lutheran Theological Seminary Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, served as project director for the Theological Schools and the Church project. Laura Mendenhall is president of Columbia Theological Seminary and served as chair of the task force.

***Theological Education* Submission Guidelines**

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

Format of the Journal: Theme Focus and Open Forum

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

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

Submission Guidelines

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

1. Recommended length of articles is 5,000 words (approximately 18 double-spaced pages).
2. Follow *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. for style and formatting, using one-inch margins, left justification, and endnotes. Convert footnotes to endnotes.
3. Write in the third-person form when possible.
4. If quoting Scripture, include the Bible translation with each reference.
5. The *American Heritage Dictionary* and the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* are the references for preferred spellings.
6. Provide a paragraph abstract of approximately 80 words at the beginning of the article.
7. Add a short (2–3 sentence) paragraph at the end of the article identifying the author(s), institution or relationship to the project/topic, position held, and/or other information relevant to the experience of the writer(s).
8. Submissions should be emailed to the managing editor, Eliza Smith Brown, at brown@ats.edu.

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

Author's Checklist

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

