

The following is excerpted from “Theological Education Matters: Leadership Education for the Church.” Copyright © 2005 by Linda Cannell

### **EXCERPTS FROM THE INTRODUCTION**

The flurry of literature on the crises afflicting theological education seems to have abated somewhat, but concerns about the future of institutionalized theological education linger. It is likely that the more effective efforts to deal with these concerns will be international in scope, learning focused, deeply concerned about theological education in relation to a biblical ecclesiology, committed to service within society, and increasingly decentralized in structure and affiliations. Credentialing and accreditation that have tended to limit development in theological education are today, especially in North America, less determinative and more supportive of change. Efforts to assist productive relationships between nondegree, noncredentialed initiatives and formal or conventional theological education are emerging in different countries.

However, concerns about the state of theological education persist: the curriculum is specialized and fragmented, thus hindering the equipping of leaders; a coherent purpose and compelling vision for theological education are lacking; the effort historically to integrate the curriculum around theology has been lost; theology itself is undefined, fragmented, rationalized, and specialized; theory and practice are in perpetual tension; and education is not sufficiently concerned with learning. Early critiques generally assumed that institutions of theological education would continue, but would be reformed over time. More recently, the suspicion is emerging that institutions of theological education as we know them—the seminary in particular—may not be necessary at all. Cynical critics ask, what is the point of a seminary education that requires more time than people are willing to give, more money than people are able to pay, more disconnection from family and career than people are willing to tolerate, and that seems to be less than effective in equipping women and men for leadership and ministry?

The vultures are not circling—yet. But the persisting criticisms and the reality that change in higher education tends to move at a glacial pace increase the probability that initiatives rapidly coming to maturity will supplant or forever change theological education as we know it.

Important to this book, and the primary reason for asking Ted to write the Foreword, is that his commitment to service—to making a difference—is undergirded by three primary educational values:

1. *Learning is collaborative and lifelong.* For example, his overseas contracts included stipulations that the relationship be collaborative and that he expected to learn from the situation. Nearly all his students can attest to the value of the learning communities that emerged in doctoral programs at MSU and TEDS.
2. *Development is a chief outcome of any educational endeavor.* For Ted this has meant investment in the personal and professional development of individuals, active response to injustice, effort to help communities develop in ways appropriate to their culture, and both the challenging and the recrafting of educational structures to reflect what most

educators claim is their purpose—development!

3. *The necessity of research.* Little progress is made in any endeavor without carefully designed research. The habit of inquiry into truth, the intentional seeking for truth, is a hallmark of the doctoral programs Ted developed. Most of his students came to understand the importance of his insistence that even theology must be marked by openness to critique and inquiry.

#### **EXCERPTED FROM CHAPTER 1:**

##### **“Perspectives on Contemporary Theological Education”**

The literature presents various perspectives as to the purpose of theological education. Clearly, the purpose that is foremost in a seminary will shape the nature and content of the curriculum and the relationships among the institution, the church, and society. Since the 1980s, the nature and purpose of theological education has been described in various ways.

- Theological education deals with knowledge. In some instances, knowledge is seen as an objective body of information, doctrine, and/or the Christian tradition transmitted to students. In other instances, knowledge is synonymous with wisdom, e.g., Farley’s *habitus* or Wood’s interplay between vision and discernment. Fostering the capacity of theological reflection is considered an important part of an educational process that links knowledge and wisdom.
- Theological education is concerned with the professional development of leaders for the church, with an emphasis on the functions and skills of ministry. Typically, the movement of the curriculum is from theory to practice. This linearity assumes that the theoretical disciplines are somehow the theory for the applied or practical disciplines. Legitimate questions relate to how the theoretical disciplines could be an adequate theory without reflexive input from the applied disciplines, or how a series of fragmented theoretical disciplines could provide a coherent theory for the practical disciplines.
- The reflective judgment literature and those concerned about *praxis* assert that theological education is a reflection on the practice of ministry while one is involved in that ministry. The assumption of a theory-to-practice linearity is replaced with the assumption that practice can also influence theory.
- More recently for Protestant schools, spiritual development, which is sometimes coupled with the term *character formation*, is accepted as one of the necessary outcomes of the seminary curriculum and institutional life.
- Finally, and not as frequent in evangelical theological education, is the view that theological education is the shaping of students’ capacities to hear another’s experience and to respond with acts of justice.

#### **EXCERPTED FROM CHAPTER 2**

##### **“Persisting Factors That Affect the Future of Theological Education”**

The tendency in the literature is to attribute theological education’s troubles to isolated issues. Because of this tendency, factions can develop among faculty, administrators, church leaders, and concerned laity, with each faction owning a problem and proposing

its own solution to it. Chapter 2 proposes that important questions related to theological education and the mission of the church in the world have been obscured by four key factors, rooted in the long history of higher education, that have *worked together* to profoundly affect the academy and the church: the rise of institutions, the rise of academic theology and academic rationalism, the rise of professionalism, and ways in which the church and the academy have understood the desire to know God.

**Factor 1: The Rise of Institutions: How institutionalism influenced understanding of the nature of knowledge and perceptions of the role of theology**

Institutions are a necessary part of a complex society; they provide much of the society's care and support for its citizens. When they function well, they stabilize society and provide energy and structures for prosperity and justice. Unfortunately, as the exposure of corruption in corporations suggests, human greed and the quest for status and position can corrupt any good.

The danger that confronts us in the twenty-first century is that society will be defined by its institutions, leading to the depersonalization of the individual and the weakening of community life. The Christian community should lead the way in exemplifying values that form healthy communities. However, the danger is equally great that the church will be defined by its institutional expression and that leadership will be defined in relation to the skills required to make the institution successful. Inevitably, the educational processes needed to serve the institutional church and extend its mission in the world will then be defined by schooling institutions, whether in church-based or academic arrangements. If these institutions are driven by a demand for leaders who can in turn create successful institutions, or by the quest for academic superiority, they will lose their prophetic and serving character. Unevaluated and unchecked, these outcomes will lead ultimately to competition, professional elitism, academic arrogance, and a renewed cycle of institutional ineffectiveness.

***Institutionalism and the Nature of Knowledge***

Dallas Willard once said that because the knowledge project is so vast and cannot be completed in one lifetime, it inevitably generates institutions. Because knowledge tends to be understood as a body of content, the institutions take on a form that seems to fit what people believe about how that knowledge is kept, enlarged upon, and communicated. The role of academic institutions is commonly understood to be supporting the creation of new knowledge while serving as the guardians of "old knowledge." Scholars and researchers brought together to fulfill this role are supported by increasingly complex institutional structures. Students join the academic community presumably to contribute to the shaping of knowledge and to assume responsibility, *upon graduation*, for responsible action in relation to knowledge. Institutions seen as successful tend to take on a life of their own and persist from generation to generation. The character and structure of these institutions shape faculty and administrators' understanding of the nature of knowledge just as much as their convictions about the nature of knowledge shape the character and structure of the institutions. Education and learning are often held hostage in this interplay.

The challenge for future development is not a lack of people with an educational vision. The challenge for the future is twofold: the lack of a coherent frame of reference and criteria against which to assess the validity of vision, and the lack of administrators and faculty who understand the complexity of the educational process in relation to how knowledge is generated, examined, and communicated. The assumption that the way to do theological education is to build a school is a seriously limiting assumption. Institutionalism has contributed to a view of knowledge as information to be stored and transmitted to the next generation of guardians and a view of learning as a function of schooling, not life.

### ***Formal Institutions and Nonformal Initiatives***

Because formal schooling is considered synonymous with education, institutions that purport to provide education look like schools. Reform initiatives often fail to take account of how formal schooling and nonformal education initiatives can interrelate, and thus such initiatives tend to polarize formal and nonformal modes. Debates over whether education should be formal or nonformal are generally irrelevant and unproductive. Typically, the debate assumes that the formal mode of education is concerned with knowledge and theory and is therefore superior, whereas the nonformal mode deals with training and technique and is therefore inferior. Formal education is considered more effective in creating people who are inventive, because they can think and work in relation to precedents from established theory and bodies of knowledge. On the other hand, nonformal education is assumed to be preoccupied with skill development or training in repeatable behaviors, not with invention or creativity. Ward asserts that when the debates about education devolve to questions about mode and method, comparisons are made between formal education *at its best and narrowly defined* and nonformal education *at its worst and poorly defined*.

Is schooling an aberration? Is it significant that Jesus never founded a school or created a three-year degree program for his disciples, even though schools existed at the time? Why do we assume that what we do in three years of formal instruction in seminaries is in some way more appropriate than what Jesus did in three years on the road, in villages, and through discourse coupled with reflection on real experience? Unfortunately, the debate persists and is increasingly tiresome and destructive to education. It seems that academia is engaged in a never-ending mental blood sport between those whose educational philosophy is stereotyped as “traditional” and those whose educational philosophy is stereotyped as “progressive.” Even though debates about modes or methods do not address the central issue, they have a long history. The persisting belief that more interesting methods and more creative degree programs will fix education continues to deflect substantive thought about the effect of institutionalized education on learning and service.

### ***The Search for the Proper Context of Theological Education***

The majority of those who attempt to apply their theological education begin where the mission of the church begins—with the problems of the human condition. In this view, theological education restricted to the academy, or formal schooling, is not adequate.

Currently seminaries are restructuring themselves as universities. Inevitably, the question will be asked if this restructured seminary is in fact able to function as a university, and if it will be any more able to serve the church. In time, will the traditional university once again become the context for theological education? If theological education is to survive in a university context, then it would seem that the university must actively seek relationship and conversation with the church. However, academics often perceive the modern church as dysfunctional, confused, at the margins of society, and lacking the spiritual character that even an unbeliever instinctively feels it should have. Similarly, church leaders are often reluctant to interact with the academy because of perceptions that its language is too esoteric, offering a scaffolding of answers often unrelated to real and increasingly complex problems.

Clearly, a viable community of scholarly inquiry and research located in the church, the seminary, and/or the university could be an essential resource for people seeking to integrate Christian faith with issues in their life and their profession and in relation to the real problems of society. However, arguments over the whether the church, the seminary, or the university is the proper context for theological education miss an important point. Theological education cannot be contained in one institution. Nor can it be defined by one mode of education (formal or nonformal). The real issues are not the survival of existing seminaries, the return to a university structure, the relocation of theological education to the church, or the formation of new institutions. New or reconfigured institutional forms and programs, along with infusions of capital, will not by themselves solve the problems that currently trouble theological institutions.

Multiple, interacting learning environments are needed to allow academic specialists, students, members of congregations, and interested members of society to engage authentic problems. Again, the solution to the problems that beset theological education is *not* to be found in a change of mode, from formal to nonformal. Rather, at least a partial solution is to be found in a more thorough understanding of the nature of learning in *each* mode and an appreciation of how formal and nonformal modes of education can work together as a complex network of experiences, processes, and relationships. The default preoccupation with building institutions, developing organizations, creating systems of control, and equating achievement with degrees, awards, grades, and particular forms of dress perverts the natural (and necessary) connections between formal and nonformal modes and blunts the contributions of education to the fostering of lifelong learning, spirituality, and service.

### **Factor 2: The Rise of Academic Theology: How academic rationalism has shaped perceptions of the purpose of knowledge and the nature of education**

Certain trends in academic theology are evident across time: the creation of separate categories for theoretical and practical knowledge, the movement of theology from the center of the curriculum to the margins, the transition from questions of doctrine open to debate to issues of dogma settled by an authoritative church and vice versa, the transition from spiritual theology to philosophical rationalism, and so on. Over time, the university structure reinforced a rationalistic orientation to knowledge with distinct disciplines. Studies within these disciplines are now at best parallel to, at worst isolated from, studies

in other disciplines. When the seminary separated from the university, it retained its academic and institutional structures.

### ***Theology in the Context of the University***

Philip Sheldrake (1998) notes that the precise date when a rational or scientific theology emerged in the West is impossible to determine. However, from about 1100 onward, scholars defined theological understanding increasingly as a task of intellectual speculation. Scripture and patristic writing began to be treated as propositions subject to the rules of Aristotelian logic. By the late nineteenth century, theology had become an encyclopedia of several disciplines with tenuous linkages to certain practical fields. Ironically, though one of the major tasks of theology was to inform the church's leadership, the contemporary church seems to have lost interest in theology.

As the disciplines of academic theology were consolidated, theological specialists trained in the academy were increasingly ill equipped to relate theology to the pressing concerns of congregations and society. Inevitably, faculty in the institutional culture of the academy tended to regard engagement with these issues as matters beyond their own specialized theological activity. Volf affirms that the church's loss of interest in academic theology is disturbing. Scholars write for students and other scholars, while "the ear of church folk is tuned in elsewhere. . . . Like the street-corner preachers of yesterday, [theologians] find themselves talking to a crowd too hurried to honor them with more than a fleeting glance" (Volf 1996, 98).

Unfortunately, in approaching theology as a process of disciplined, analytic rationality, i.e., as an exercise of mind and language, the less precise understanding of theology as that which is derived from the desire to know God and the need to relate faith to all of life retreated to the margins of the academy. Interestingly, Ellen Charry, commenting on the purpose of her book, writes, "Although I started this project as an exercise in historical theology, a constructive thesis emerged: when Christian doctrines assert truth about God, the world, and ourselves, it is a truth that seeks to influence us. As I worked through the texts, the divisions of the modern theological curriculum began making less and less sense to me" (Charry 1997, viii).

Increasingly, faculty and church leaders are concerned that a fragmented theological curriculum has helped to weaken the connections between belief and practice, piety and reason, knowledge and virtue. Some contemporary theological educators from different disciplines, perceiving that how theology is understood affects the structures and practices of theological education (and vice versa), are challenging the perception that the primary task of theology is to understand itself intellectually. Renewed concern for the virtue-shaping function of theology and the role of theology in the transformation of the church and society is gradually refocusing attention on the relationship of theology to the essential practices of the faith community: prayer, learning, service, and worship.

The "grand project" of the academy—the organization and dissemination of knowledge—is such a powerful tradition that anyone committed to it is virtually unable

to hear words such as *experience* and *praxis* without automatically assuming that the speaker is disparaging intellectual activity or reasoned discourse. The Bible never disparages idea, thought, or intellectual engagement; however, intellectualism without obedience, knowing without appropriate response, was severely judged by God. The imbalance arising from knowledge acquisition and inquiry without a corresponding and intentionally encouraged commitment to responsible practice, or from experiential learning that fails to consider insights from relevant knowledge seriously, can only hinder efforts to think freshly about the future of theological education.

The literature on theological education attests that an increasing number of faculty, administrators, church leaders, and laity view efforts to undergird the presumed purposes of the seminary (professional development, personal and spiritual formation, engagement with culture, cultivation of a Christian mind) with a rationalistic view of knowledge in what is essentially a university structure as a failing enterprise. The array of voices critiquing higher education today is almost without precedent. The literature is replete with calls for alternatives to theological institutions as we know them.

### ***The Reemergence of Theology in the University***

Toulmin, Wolterstorff, Marsden, and Volf are among a number of contemporary university-based historians, philosophers, and theologians who propose that there has been a shift from philosophical and theological rationalism to a concern for the role of theology in human experience. Toulmin for one, does not suggest that all theological content be abandoned. He maintains that transdisciplinary dialogue will be effective only to the degree that theological *content* is preserved. However, he does not support the status quo in relation to the teaching of this content. The central ideas must be taught—but taught in relation to their practical effect, which “has implications for *how* theology is taught in the contemporary university”(Toulmin 1990, 64). If academic theology is ever able to recover its historic position as a servant to the church and society, Toulmin concludes that “on more and more levels, any exclusive preoccupation with the ramifications of separate disciplines appears pointless and partial. In particular, if we explore the underlying presuppositions of different disciplines, and the assumptions involved in separating them, we are increasingly led into a *transdisciplinary* dialogue, of a kind to which theology has a distinctive contribution to make” (ibid., 62).

What is the proper application of scholarship, to train the mind or to prepare professionals who serve? Needless to say, the answer to this question affects curricular decisions. If training the mind is the aim, what areas of knowledge are best suited to this task? If the central task of the university and, by extension, the seminary is to prepare professionals, is the emphasis on the learned professional or the competent practitioner? And what experiences and skills should be part of the curriculum? These questions are directly relevant to the development of the seminary, in that it incorporated the professional aspect of the divinity school while retaining the academic characteristics of the university.

### **Factor 3: The Rise of Professionalism in Higher Education: How professionalism has effected theological education and the church**

Through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, seminary development was affected by the complex interplay of the demands of established churches for an educated clergy, the lingering effects of Colonial-era college ideals, the concern that graduate education would lessen clergy effectiveness, the growth of the universities and their increasing distance from Christianity, and the influence of graduates from German universities. Early in the nineteenth century, theological education was still concerned to prepare persons for a revivalist ministry. It was more practical than intellectual and influenced more by Pietism than by the methods of scientific scholarship. By the last half of the nineteenth century, many graduates of German universities returned to America and took teaching positions in the new seminaries. They brought the “new learning” to these schools, challenging traditional doctrines of the denominations and the ideals that had inspired college education. Paralleling a similar trend in the universities, seminaries began to incorporate increasing numbers of specialized, professional degree programs that were not always tied to theological inquiry or to ideals embodied in the colonial colleges. The incorporation of German research methods and the emphasis on scientifically informed professionalism introduced into nineteenth-century Protestant theological education an element of confusion that continues to the present. Questions persist about the effectiveness of the German university’s research model oriented toward professionalism, in relation to the English classical model oriented toward character and in relation to the ideal of pious learning oriented to service.

#### ***Professional Ministry Education in the Twentieth Century***

There was little resistance to the professionalization of the curriculum from the churches that were themselves, by the early twentieth century, complex, specialized organizations. It was inevitable that the schools would be called upon to prepare ministry specialists for these churches. Though the possibility that specialization would fragment the curriculum seemed to concern the founders of the universities, they believed that their mission to serve the institutions of society would overcome the problems of fragmentation.

As churches increased in complexity through the twentieth century, they began their gradual evolution into corporations managed by a CEO-style leader with special skills. The role of the minister as pastor and preacher did not disappear, but the relationship between the minister and the community was more often that of a specialist serving a particular sector of society. The curriculum of the schools was shaped by often-conflicting demands for education in pastoral and leadership skills and the traditional scholastic subjects. By this time, theology in the seminary had been shaped by more rational approaches to academic theology and diffused into specializations. Once churches felt the need for professionally trained leadership, the focus of the seminary changed. Through the twentieth century, theological education was tailored (consciously or unconsciously) to serve the church’s felt need for specialized, professional leadership. In the 1970s, “liberating the laity” was a momentary theme in literature and conferences on church renewal, but the structures of the church were now so ingrained and the relationships of clergy and laity in relation to those structures so defined that only questions about the liberation of *structures* could make a difference.

It is still unclear whether the church has been well served by the inclusion of a substantial number of professional programs in the curriculum and by classification of the master of divinity degree as a professional degree. In reality, though the M.Div. is classified as a professional degree, in many seminaries it is treated as if it were a liberal arts degree. Assessment standards are not consistent with those expected of a professional program, admission requirements seldom assess the suitability of the applicant for the *profession*, and graduates are not expected to be accountable to professional standards or to undertake mandatory continuing education.

Does the seminary need to be a professional school, or would the church be better served by some productive relationship between the academy, a professional institute connected to the church, and required experiences in society and international contexts? Though professionalism is appropriate for the church and ministry, to copy definitions, standards, and educational practices from other professions may not be sufficient.

Kelsey points out a critical factor in thinking about professional education in seminaries (and in nonformal ventures). The nature of leadership of congregations is fundamentally different from the professional notion of leadership. Having traced common elements in the definition of profession, David Kelsey proposes that church leadership is not consistent with many of the sociological characteristics of a profession. One of his more significant objections is consistent with a congregationally-based understanding of leadership: “Theologically, it is important to stress that it is the *entire congregation* that engages in ministry in the public worship of God. Various kinds of leadership in regard to that ministry are exercised by persons who stand in parity with everybody else so far as their shared ministry is concerned. Hence a profession’s stress on ‘autonomy’ and its view of those served as ‘clients’ are both inappropriate in congregational leadership” (Kelsey 1992, 247, emphasis added).

Many, if not most, professional activities of clergy could also be carried out by laity. Is it, then, necessary for a layperson who is serious about ministry and spirituality to go to seminary and then into ministry? To what extent have criteria from operational notions of professional behavior been adopted uncritically in theological education? How did the apostle Paul credential leaders in the church? What indicators satisfied Jesus that his disciples were becoming what he desired?

### ***The New Professionalism***

Perhaps the more appropriate way to think of the seminary’s involvement in professional education is not as preparatory but as developmental. The curriculum is already hopelessly mired with courses; a solution could be reconfiguring it to allow an appropriate sequence of courses while other learning components are removed from the curriculum to become part of the graduates’ lifelong learning experience. Professional education, except in ministerial education, presumes that the development of professional capacity extends over several years—it doesn’t end once a degree is in hand. Further, one’s continuance in the profession is contingent upon regular and continuing education in which the individual interacts with other professional fields and is guided in reflection on practice.

A recent denominational magazine featured testimonials from several pastors, bemoaning the fact that on graduation from seminary they were unprepared to do the work they were expected to do in the church. The implied criticism, of course, is that seminary education is not effective. Yet to what extent is any graduate of any profession able to conduct professional work immediately upon graduation? Most professional fields (medicine, law, engineering) have extensive periods of internship, residency, or apprenticeship before the initiate is deemed capable. Once capability is granted, the professional is obligated to engage in regular experiences of professional development in order to remain credentialed.

**Factor 4: The Disposition of the Soul toward God: How the church and academy have understood and fostered the desire to know God**

Farley favors a notion of *theologia* informed by the mysticism of the patristic era but shaped finally by the later medieval period through the Renaissance. The important distinction he makes between the patristic era and the later period is that, though the notion of divine illumination persisted, it was conceived in the later period as related to the schools and was regarded as a habit—a *habitus*. That is, it could be “promoted, deepened, and extended by human study and argument” (Farley 1983, 36). Based on his interpretation of patterns in history, Farley concludes that *theologia* is best understood as the ecclesial counterpart of *paidea*. The loss of this understanding in the current era has made theological education the “grasping of the methods and contents of a plurality of regions of scholarship” (ibid., 153). Theological education, for Farley, should be concerned with the cultivation of theological judgment rather than presuming that theology (conceived as a system of rationally derived propositions) buttresses a functional understanding of ministry. *Theologia* is best depicted as a mode of understanding—a process—rather than as a science; and like *paideia*, it is a preparation for life. Properly understood, Farley maintains that *theologia* cannot be taught, but it can be the unifying principle for theological study and the orienting philosophy of the curriculum.

In favoring the understanding of *theologia* that emerged in the twelfth to seventeenth centuries, Farley may not have taken enough account of the deep complexities in the understandings of theology and spirituality from the patristic era to the seventeenth century. The general consensus in the literature is that theology and spirituality, now seen as two distinct areas of knowledge and practice, were, for most of history, one unified essence. As institutionalism, academic rationalism, and professionalism proceeded, this essence fractured. Farley laments the loss of *theologia* and suggests that the specialization and fragmentation of theological education is due to a loss of unity in theology. However, this notion of the loss of unity cannot be fully apprehended without considering the significance of the one essence of theology *and* spirituality.

Farley links *theologia* with a “cognitive disposition.” Kelsey (1992) speaks of knowing God truly, and Dykstra (1991) refers to theology in the context of the essential practices of the church (see Charry below for explication on the ways in which “practices” is understood in this section). However, many efforts to describe a renewed theology are

still embedded in the notion that theology, contemplation, and knowing are activities grounded in reason—and to a great extent dominated by reason. Suggesting that the meaning and purpose of theology can be recovered by a return to Western medieval understandings of theology tends to obscure the significant fact that theology for most of history was of one essence with the ineffable *mysteries* of spirituality, and not driven exclusively by reason.

### ***The Search for a Theology and Spirituality for Theological Education***

Efforts to recover a theology for theological education must address the fundamental issue: humanity is not brought into right relationship with God and empowered for service through doctrine, or experience, alone. Clearly, then, if *theologia* is a missing element in theological education, it must be seen as a much broader realm than a cognitively oriented academic discipline of theology, however unified. The educative task is a holism of cognition, affect, and purposeful action. This is not a new idea. Only recently, in fact, was the notion of holistic learning almost completely banished from theological education.

It is now stating the obvious that the most tragic result of the loss of theology's primary purpose was to render it marginal to both the church and the academy. Rampant dysfunctions in both the institutionalized church and the academy were deepened when *living* theology was diminished as the central task of the believer. Living theology, of course, requires a lifelong commitment to interpretation of situations in the light of the gospel. In this regard, Farley is right in locating the task of interpretation in the church. In doing so, the question must be asked, "What would it mean to facilitate the interpretive life of the congregation and its members?" (Farley 2003, 11). Efforts to know God academically, to derive formulas and propositions that define God's essence and work, actually hinder the development of the people of God. One's understanding of God and one's life in relation to that understanding cannot be separated. The essential task of church leadership is to lead people to understand their identity and purpose as the people of God. If leaders are required who will facilitate the interpretive life of the congregation, theological education in its common institutional form, and with its traditional curricular framework, will not do the job.

Nevertheless, many efforts to locate theological education in the church involve simply transplanting seminary or seminary-like courses. This replication of schooling in the church will not accomplish the task of developing the interpretive life of the congregation or assist the believer in the desire to know God. Farley's description of the development of the interpretive life is significant at this point. Our capacity for theological interpretation is developed along with participation in worship, remembering the Story of faith, and service. It is never simply casual religious opinion based on one's prejudices or experience.

If theology and spirituality were separated when the knowledge project became rationalized and the prerogative of institutions (schools), how can they be rejoined? The cultural situation is different, knowledge has expanded, and even if such an effort were desirable, it is impossible to return to the patristic and pre-Enlightenment eras. Philip

Sheldrake cites the positions of Sandra Schnieders and Bernard McGinn as complementary alternatives. “Schneiders believes that spirituality and theology are close partners that function in mutuality but respect each other’s autonomy” (Sheldrake 1998, 84). In other words, spirituality is not a category *within* theology. “McGinn believes that spirituality is somehow primary in its partnership with theology” (ibid., 85). Both Schneiders and McGinn preserve the interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary nature of spirituality. It is not captured within theology as much as it is part of all theological discourse, and for McGinn, belief and practice are the “primary criteria of interpretation” (ibid.). Essentially, then, theology must recognize that it has a spiritual core. However, today theology and spirituality are separated, and education cannot proceed as if they were of one essence. Therefore, some form of dialogue between theology and spirituality is the only way forward. Retaining courses in theology and adding a course in spirituality is not sufficient. Retaining courses and adding a parallel system of group experiences without integration with those courses is similarly inadequate. Because theology in the academy has been informed by the “familiar conversations with philosophy or other intellectual disciplines” (ibid., 86), Sheldrake warns that the rational discourse characteristic of academic theology will subsume spirituality into its own structures. A more humble theological discipline recognizes that spirituality serves to prevent a systematized or philosophical theology from imagining that it speaks the definitive word about God.

The major difficulty in embracing the possibility of an effective dialogue between theology and spirituality is that spirituality is seen as derived from experience. Therefore, when Sheldrake points out that “it is difficult to avoid the evidence of history that concrete spiritual traditions arise from Christian experiences or from the concrete realities of human existence rather than being derived from ideas and doctrines” (Sheldrake 1998, 86), many Protestants envision only contemporary pop spirituality, reflected in worship as entertainment and in self-serving ministry programs. But if “the Christian way began with *events* rather than with a shift of theory born of intellectual speculation,” and if Jesus’ followers experienced “their own lives and the nature of God’s relationship with the world in a new way because of the impact upon them of the events of Jesus life,” it follows that theological discourse can be “questioned and even deconstructed by the deeper insight that the reality of God is beyond the ‘God’ of rational argument” (ibid.). Sheldrake addresses inevitable concerns about the appeal to experience by defining experience in relation to the classic threefold formula of *sola fide*, *sola scriptura*, and *sola gratia*.

The rational discourse of theology must be thought of as subordinate to three things: to the original act of faith of Jesus’ companions, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (*sola fide*); to the fact that this faith is brought about by the action of God, “flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father in heaven” (*sola gratia*); and to the privileged expression of this faith in the pages of Scripture (*sola scriptura*). (ibid., 87)

The fact that God will never be completely known perpetuates the mystery of the faith. In

this respect, the temptation of rational theology toward closure is countered by the spiritual certainty that the journey of faith is always *toward* God. Spirituality, then, to a greater degree than academic theology, which tends to be dominated by Western reason, calls for the input and critique of the other. On the journey toward God, understanding and the enlightenment of faith are impoverished without the stories of God's acts among people found in Scripture, stories from the long history of the church, and the input and critique of men and women from other cultures and social situations. Issues of justice, power, self-interest, ethnocentrism, and institutional structures must then be examined and challenged, because injustice, the abuses of power, and oppression hinder the journey.

At this point we can return to Farley for help as we seek to determine how the relation of theology and spirituality is accomplished in theological education. Though McGinn and Farley would likely disagree on the place of spirituality and theology, and though Farley is not as explicitly concerned with the separation between theology and spirituality, they are moving in the same direction. "Theology in its primary meaning and as we are using it is a personal and existential wisdom or understanding. As such it is not tied to any specific course of studies such as clergy education. As such it sets its own requirements for studies, knowledge, and disciplines depending on the context in which it occurs" (Farley 1983, 153). Allowing that clergy education is necessary, Farley maintains that theology cannot be "restricted to clergy education and its array of scholarly endeavors. . . . Because theology arises as an adjunct to the life of faith itself, *the inquiries and instructions of degree-granting schools are always derivative and secondary*" (Farley 2003, 36, emphasis added).

But doesn't the array of practical subjects and their use of the social sciences indicate that the seminary is cognizant of the life situation of the believer? Not as long as theology and social sciences are severed *because of the nature of the theological curriculum and attitudes of some faculty who believe that God speaks only in the theological courses*. Productive insights are possible only as equitable conversation among the disciplines is encouraged. For example, following Alasdair MacIntyre's suggestion that moral philosophy presupposes a sociology, Richard Mouw proposes "that every theological system also has an associated sociology, such that we can fully understand the claims of a theological perspective only if we attempt to see what it would look like if those claims were fleshed out in the life of a community" (Mouw 2001, 73–74).

The undue separation of God's natural and special revelation ensures the withdrawal of theology into a narrowly specialized academic world. If theology is the critical knowledge of God in the midst of creation and human life, then the findings of both natural and special revelation are needed in the endeavor. Thoughtful interdisciplinary dialogue that reflects broadly on creation and on God's sixth-day creation is essential. The point is not to abandon the contributions of the classical disciplines but rather *to avoid accepting these disciplines alone as those that define the parameters of the dialogue*.

### ***Perspectives on the Nature of Theology and Spirituality***

Charry weaves together from the history of Christian doctrine a defensible thesis that character formation, trust, love of God, and virtuous acts were once integral to theology and vital to knowing God. Her account seeks to recover the holism of Christian theology: the notion that integration of mind, emotions and behavior, within the context of a faithful community, is essential to the formation of Christian identity. “Communal practices such as participation in prayer, liturgy, sacraments, works of charity, and study all strengthen Christian identity. That is one reason why Christian communities have been fussy about ordering these communal tasks” (Charry 1997, 27). The habits of isolated linearity of the modern theologian are challenged in Charry’s work. Rather than view knowledge about God as the precursor to loving God, Charry argues from the long history of the Christian church that communal practices reinforce knowledge and prepare the Christian for proper interpretation of knowledge. The idea that knowledge could be separated from practice would have mystified premodern theologians (Charry 1997, 28).

Since the late Middle Ages, it seems, Western Christians have been unable to hold intellect and piety in constructive tension. Without intellectual rigor and the intent to inquire into God’s revelation, spirituality tends to be shaped by personal experience, opinion, or the latest media personality. Without the desire to know God through the mysterious activity of the Spirit, intellectual inquiry and memorization of propositions tend to become meaningless activities of an empty soul.

### ***The Great Divide***

As one processes the trajectory of concerns in the literature related to theology and theological education, the suspicion emerges that the primary problem, after all, is not the specialization and fragmentation of theology into various disciplines. The greater problem for theological education, and consequently for the church, is that at some point, for reasons that seemed justified at the time, theology ceased to be described as of one essence with spirituality and became, in the West especially, a rational enterprise. In reality, the desire to hold together reason and piety, academy and church, virtue and service, can be realized only if theology and spirituality are, in fact, of one essence. If this is accepted, reflection on the nature of learning experiences becomes more fruitful.

Several suggest that in the West, before the rise of the universities and Scholasticism, theology and spirituality were not programmatically distinguished and that a series of institutional developments contributed to the division (Lindbeck 1996, 293; see also Louth 1983; Charry 1997; Allen 1997; McIntosh 1998). For instance, by the sixteenth century, the notion that all clergy should be theologically educated was commonplace. Theological education for Protestants took place in the universities. Catholics, under mandate from the Council of Trent, established seminaries. It would be another 250 years before the first Protestant seminaries (Andover and Princeton) were established. In the universities, clergy were to be intellectually prepared to interpret and defend the Word and to learn the skills they would need as leaders of the church. “Thus, the gap between theology and spirituality widened” (Lindbeck 1996, 294). McIntosh is concerned that if theology and spirituality remain separated, theology will actually begin to speak of a different God. “What kind of god does theology divorced from spirituality end up

describing?” (McIntosh 1998, 15).

### ***The Mystery of Faith and the Character of Theology***

The inevitable criticism that an emphasis on spirituality and mystery undercuts serious learning about theology ought to be rejected. Of course, much that has been gained over the centuries of the Christian church would be lost if learning were despised. Surely we have learned this lesson from history. The peril that confronts us today is that an impoverished theology will exacerbate the sense of loss of God’s presence that already exists at the heart of Western culture and in the church. In this era, popular spirituality is not described in terms of reason and piety but in terms of how to have a meaningful experience of God and personal freedom within community. The quest is not to find some rational orderly, consistent, logical way to prove God but rather to find meaning in some experience of God and to determine if that meaning can be an adequate ground for life. Once again, in this generation, a view of spirituality that is grounded in experience is in tension with a view of spirituality grounded in reason. Only a theology that allows reason and piety, virtue and service to stand together will be convincing. Admittedly, when experience and the ineffable are encouraged, Christians may default to personal experience as the arbiter of faith. However, this only confirms the need for a theology that embodies within it the effective practices of the intellect *and* the mystery of piety.

It does seem that the challenge for institutions that seek to give shape to the religious quest in our era will be to recover the single essence of theology and spirituality. If this can be done effectively, it may be possible to attain a fresh union of reason and piety, virtue and service. If this occurs, the structures of theological education can be transformed, and the church can discover afresh its identity as the people of God.

### **EXCERPTS FROM CHAPTER 3:**

#### **A Threat Matrix: Challenges Confronting the Seminary and the Church**

Arrangements of disciplines, assumptions about the nature of knowledge, and teaching methods, along with the social structures of academia, are today so familiar as to seem unalterable. Yet the four interdependent factors explored in chapter 2 essentially created and continue to reinforce these structures, practices, and traditions. Chapter 3 traces the conviction that a matrix composed of these four factors now threatens the future of theological education.

Out of the intertwined processes of institutionalism, rationalism, professionalism, and the desire to know God, and mingled effects of the English college and German research university models, emerged the now-familiar structures and curricula of universities and Protestant theological education. By the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the forces of institutionalism, rationalism, and professionalism had become a mutually reinforcing matrix that, coupled with the rush to *Wissenschaft* and industrial models of organization, blunted spirituality in the academy and with it the desire to know God. Efforts to classify, organize, and systematize knowledge further defined institutional structures and reinforced a dominating rationalism that ultimately separated spirituality from the disciplines of knowledge and shifted it away from the center of

discourse to the margins. Universities, colleges, and theological institutions evolved in similar ways because they borrowed structures and programs from one another. For example, why should a Ph.D. level of specialization in a discipline automatically translate into a corresponding department, a category in the theological curriculum, and a way of teaching? Imagine an alternative construction where faculty with hard-won specialized knowledge could bring their individual *and collective* insight to bear on persisting problems, seminal ideas, conflicting perspectives, and urgent tasks. In reality, disciplinary boundaries make sense only to schools. None of the boundaries make sense when a student graduates and endeavors to minister in the world.

The primary concern of this book is the nature and purpose of theological education. Today we tend to identify theological education with seminaries and in some cases with divinity schools. Concern about the effectiveness of institutionalized theological education is increasing. Change is an inexorable process, so even if we fail to act in relation to these concerns, theological education will change. However, focusing on one or two concerns at a time and polarizing ourselves in relation to those concerns is not helpful. As difficult as it is, the processes that have shaped higher education and theological education in particular must be seen as a whole—a matrix—that continues to affect how we view theological education. Remembering what a matrix is—an environment or source from which something else originates, develops, or takes form, a milieu that seems permanent but was itself the result of decisions made across centuries—may be more helpful as we search for “something else,” alternative forms of theological education that will better serve the mission of the church in the twenty-first-century world. As in the past, our work of reformation will require the support of foundations and others willing to invest in the future rather than the past.

## **EXCERPTS FROM CHAPTER 9:**

### **Toward a Learning Century for Theological Education**

Over time, American higher education has adapted and reinvented itself repeatedly in response to social, economic, and political changes. And it will again. Today, as at the end of the nineteenth century and again after World War II, new ways of envisioning and organizing academic life are emerging. This time, however, the attention centers less on building new institutional structures, redefining the curriculum, or expanding access and more on the very heart of education: the improvement of teaching and learning. Literature on educational renewal suggests that the prevailing instructional paradigm is giving way gradually to a learning paradigm. The role of the teacher is being recast from that of an expert who distributes a store of knowledge to one who shapes tasks that compel a search for knowledge, develops capacities such as judgment and evaluation, and encourages skills of lifelong learning. A mere presentation of information does not equal learning and is insufficient for today’s learners, who need to grasp the meaning and application of knowledge. The use of disciplines as the organizing principle for the curriculum is being questioned, and assessment of learning is slowly replacing conventional and sometimes unjust methods of testing. Similarly, the tendency to equate particular methods with good teaching is giving way to efforts to foster a learning culture. This chapter is built on the real possibility that a shift from an instructional paradigm to a learning paradigm may be

the next sea change in the historical development of theological education. Will the twenty-first century be the Learning Century in theological education?

### ***Rethinking the Structure of the Disciplines***

The presumption of disciplines is at the heart of the curriculum. The common definition of a discipline is that it has its own literature, its own questions, and a particular subject matter. However in reality, most disciplines are shaped by other disciplines and are in their very DNA interdisciplinary. Given that disciplines are naturally interconnected, why do we persist in isolating them from one another in schools? Daniel James Rowley, Herman D. Lujan, and Michael G. Dolence suggest that “permanent departmental structures need to give way to learning teams of scholars, brought together by common interests and working with students as partners and aides” (Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence 1998, 181). Since a discipline creates a paradigmatic way of looking at reality, housing like faculty together prevents them from engaging broader arenas of knowledge that could inform their thinking and enrich their teaching. Surely, faculty from the same specialization could organize opportunities for conversation with one another even if they were not permanently sequestered in a specialized department.

Is combining or integrating disciplines the way forward? Certainly the proximity of disciplines—or of faculty from different disciplines—is no guarantee that integration is occurring. Still, since no one discipline has a monopoly on truth, some form of interdependence among fields of knowledge is desirable when learners are present. Past efforts and present realities suggest that curriculum design must be flexible so that the decisions of one generation don’t become the straitjackets for the next. The fundamental principle is that learning communities, understanding the depth and variety of designs that are possible, can create a multitextured learning environment.

Clearly, the fragmentation of disciplines is problematic. Those who advocate integration, or interdisciplinary education, often assume that integration is accomplished simply through some form of team teaching. Though the idea of team teaching is valid and in some cases is practiced effectively, the reality is that the problems that affect humankind do not easily fit the customary classroom patterns of the disciplines. It may be necessary to ground interdisciplinary experiences in something other than subject matter of the disciplines as we know them. In other words, the way forward may not be to attempt to integrate fields of knowledge or to have faculty members from different divisions in the same classroom speaking about their respective subject matter. It may be necessary to establish the curriculum on a different footing altogether. For example, if the curriculum were organized around church practices, or service, or problems, the faculty from the various disciplines would together become resources for learners who are working intensively with issues, problems, and well-considered tasks that constitute the curriculum. Contemporary society is not structured to benefit a curriculum dispersed in isolated courses. Those who are to function in society must learn how to approach the sorts of ill-structured problems that arise in society.

Integration of disciplines is difficult to manage, and the concept of integration may actually be founded on a curricular myth. The conventional assumption is that the four

folds of the curriculum can be integrated because they are all concerned about the same thing—the same thing defined according to the perspective of particular faculty. Examples of the same thing include preparing leaders for the mission of the church, equipping the mind, promoting spiritual growth, and so on. “The literature rejects this view. Farley and others have produced convincing evidence that the pattern of studies and its divisions developed haphazardly. They were not devised to reach any one objective, and they are not parts of any larger whole. Therefore, contrary to the conventional wisdom, they are unlikely to be integrated, no matter how hard we struggle to do that” (Kelsey and Wheeler 1994, 79). Because any original intent to maintain coherence in the fourfold model has disappeared, leaving the four separate pieces of the curriculum to function on their own, integrative models may be undone by the strong tendency of each fold to establish a singular identity in relation to other folds. Besides, it is difficult to integrate things that are constantly changing and developing, and the powerful individualism of faculty and pervasive competitiveness among departments can politicize the effort to such an extent that integration at any level becomes impossible. When prestige is associated with one’s own scholarly work, and when faculty have themselves been educated within competitive academic environments, collaboration and cooperation are even more difficult.

Theological education is a twofold concept, encompassing the nature of theology and the nature of education. Much of the contemporary literature on theological education has focused on the meaning of theology, but it is time to consider the meaning of education. Boyatzis, Cowen, and Kolb suggest that “managing change in the academic curriculum, in what is taught and how it is learned, must rank among the top twenty-first-century management challenges for higher education” (1995, 1). They note that it takes an average of five years to complete a curriculum revision. If the resulting programs are not revised again for another five to twenty years, “we see that the fundamental knowledge base communicated to students changes in a ten- to fifteen-year cycle. This is too slow for the pace of the 21st century” (ibid.). The answer is not simply to shorten the revision cycle. Innovation within the entire learning process is necessary. The community as context for learning and the nature of learning as a holistic process of development will significantly affect course structure, teaching practices, and matters that reinforce learning. This work will be done because it must be done. If current institutions of higher education cannot do it, other institutions and educational ventures will emerge.

### ***The Assessment of Learning***

John Harris argues that a fundamental problem is that higher education is packaged in ways that are not optimal for learning. The silo structure of administrative and academic departments in reality serves the institution, not the learner. Similarly, course divisions often benefit the faculty and institution more than the student or the outcomes we desire. The world and ministry don’t come packaged in the course divisions we have created. To strengthen its espoused purposes, theological education would be better served by changing the focus from eligibility for a degree to developing proficiencies in some area of endeavor or knowledge building. These changes would change the way faculty and administration, and students, view assessment. Harris argues that the further away assessment is from the settings where learning is to be applied, the less acceptable or

reliable it is. After many years of research and practice, he has determined that grades don't correlate with much of anything except other grades. Further, standardized tests have low validity in terms of what they purport to measure.

Ward argues that faculty perspectives on testing need to incorporate two fundamental elements: assessment of learning is the assessment of the products of *whole learning experiences* rather than isolated segments taken out of context, and assessment of a program's effectiveness is more important than assessment of a student. Increasingly, it is recommended that transcripts be redesigned to reveal patterns of personal, professional, and academic development across a student's academic career. Increasingly, as the focus of education shifts to learning, testing and assignment of grades for student performance as the inalienable right of faculty alone is being challenged.

### **The Lifelong Learner—A Spiritual Vision for Theological Education**

Lifelong theological learning is predicated on the understanding that two to four years of formal theological education is not sufficient for one to understand a field or develop competency in ministry. Yet the structures of formal theological education are based on the premise that the years involved in earning a degree are sufficient. Tragically, it is possible to complete a three- or four-year theology degree without having developed the habits of thinking theologically. Similarly, it is possible to complete two- or three-year degrees in some aspect of ministry leadership and not be able to function as a ministry leader. When preparation is the goal and the rationale for institutional structure and curriculum, and when the degree is considered a sufficient base for service, students will inevitably assume their learning is complete after the degree is attained.

In much of the world, and increasingly in North America, economic resources to support traditional schools are diminishing rapidly. It is becoming apparent that the only way forward is to seek productive relationships among formal and nonformal educational ventures so that individuals and communities have access to learning opportunities for all of life. In this way, the hopelessly crowded curricula of theological schools could be alleviated. It is no longer necessary for schools to teach all that is needed for a profession or an academic specialization in the brief years of a degree program. If schools partner with nonformal ventures in planning for and supporting lifelong learning opportunities, they can be much more selective and intentional about what to include in their curriculum; and use faculty with greater effectiveness. However, schools will have to be more creative in writing faculty contracts. The current practice in most schools, of contracting with faculty simply for a set number of credit hours or number of classes to be taught, militates against the sort of flexibility that will be needed in the future.

### ***Lifelong Learning and the Desire to Know God***

Embracing lifelong learning as normative for theological education is consistent with the deepest values and commitments of Christian faith. Christians are pilgrims, learning is best imaged as a shared journey, and lifelong learning is compatible with the Christian mandate of a lifetime of obedience. The culture of learning communities, whether formal or nonformal, is such that each one helps the other to be more like Christ.

## **EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER 10:**

### **Toward an International Twenty-first-century Theological Education**

*To what extent can typically Euro-American institutional models of theological education serve today's Christian communities? Ted Ward*

“What constitutes a valid theological education in Manila, or Tokyo, or rural Nigeria? What does the student need to learn, to know, to do, to be? How can learning experiences be structured which will achieve these goals?” (Ward and Rowen 1972, 19). The familiar curricular and institutional relationships of Western theological schools were shaped by an emerging institutionalism and rationalism and a demand for professional church leaders. Western forms of theological education have been copied in other countries, but more recently these forms are being reconsidered as non-Western person assume leadership in international theological education. It is no longer a matter of debate that conventional approaches to theological education are deficient. Even in the West, alternative approaches are emerging at a rapid rate, but often without the benefit of informed reflection from the rest of the world. For example, how many North American schools have consulted with Brazilian, Nigerian, Indian, or Argentinian educators? How many North American schools have sent their administrators to the Philippines, Indonesia, South Africa, or Hong Kong to learn from them what issues will affect the future? Until we develop genuine partnerships or consortia of schools internationally, with curricula that offer reciprocity in what constitutes experience and knowledge, we will make little headway in addressing the challenges of leadership development for the church.

Many years ago, the president of a leading American university asserted that since knowledge is everywhere the same, education can be everywhere the same. Whether our primary association is with the church or within the various expressions of theological education, dare we assume that there is one world norm for theological education? Read the brochures from the increasing number of conferences on international education or intercultural dialogue. What insight do they provide for those leading curriculum and program change? For example, among the seminars offered at a recent conference were topics such as these:

- developing alternatives to polarization on divisive issues
- understanding cross-cultural conflict
- experiential learning strategies for intercultural training
- forming a vocabulary for intercultural interaction
- building bridges across cultures
- diversity training in ecclesiastical contexts

## **EXCERPT FROM THE CONCLUSION**

Interestingly, in theological education at least, many current initiatives reflect the values and practices of much earlier times. Nonformal education has been the pattern for most of history. For centuries the church was the center of theological education. Apprenticeship models were common in ancient times. Learning in ministry is a longstanding tradition. Interacting across disciplines of knowledge was taken for granted until the academy

determined that it would be more efficient to organize the curriculum in broad subject areas. Current efforts to reform theological education could be seen, then, as flawed efforts to recover approaches that were proven inadequate and cast aside in favor of today's more familiar academic models.<sup>1</sup> Or the educational practices of most conventional theological schools around the world gradually emerged from a series of decisions made across time, without substantive reflection as to consequences, and should be reformed.

It also seems that an increasing number of men and women, most between thirty-five and forty-five years of age, and most with a Ph.D. in any of a variety of disciplines, are less interested in progressing through an academic career in conventional programs. Their vision for education and leadership development is not easily accommodated in traditional structures. Unfortunately, vision is often held captive by the need to eat! But, perhaps, one or more foundations, several courageous and skilled academic administrators, insistent and collegial faculty, persistent and discerning students, and a host of committed congregational leaders will one day work together to reshape theological education for the whole people of God.

### **I Skate Where the Puck Will Be, Not Where It Is.—Wayne Gretzky**

Why do ministers need to know theology? Why is it important for the whole people of God to be able to assess life and experience theologically? Does theology, in the forms that are common in many seminaries, contribute to the development of a church that is qualitatively different from any other organization in society? What difference would it make to Western theology if it truly encountered the rest of the world? What difference would it make if voices that are not traditionally heard (the disadvantaged, the oppressed, those without power or authority in congregations, children and youth) were included?

Varieties of nonformal theological education are emerging in many countries. Many of these ventures will fail because the designers simply attempt to replicate courses, tests, and curriculum designs from the schools they criticize, or because for financial, prestige, or perceived credentialing needs, they connect with a school and are absorbed by that school, or because, driven by the agenda of one person or narrowly focused group, they are unable to respond to the complex challenges of this age. Still, since there will never be enough seminaries to complete the task of leader development for the church, productive partnerships between formal and nonformal agencies of education are essential.

We are long past the day when the seminary could do all that was expected of it. The curriculum is glutted with programs, littered with degrees, stuck in an instructional paradigm. Conversations today about theological education increasingly tackle such

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<sup>1</sup>. The apprenticeship model faltered when the limitations of the master were replicated in the apprentice. The master-apprentice model could be rendered ineffectual by an inadequate master. On-the-job training (or what theological education would term fieldwork or internship) has been criticized on the same basis: the trainee can be shaped adversely by an inadequate work environment.

questions as, Should theological education be considered preparatory (ignoring the experience and background of students) or developmental (presuming that theological education is part of a long process of lifelong learning)? Is theological education primarily about knowledge for knowledge's sake, or is some notion of praxis important? Should theological education continue to reinforce competitive modes of learning or foster an active and diverse learning community? To what extent can formal and nonformal modes of learning support and inform one another? How do we serve the continuing professional development needs of alumni and other ministry professionals? How defensible is it to maintain disciplines in isolation from one another? At a time when theological institutions are playing off theological education accrediting agencies against government accrediting agencies, to whom is theological education accountable? Who are the stakeholders in decisions that are made in relation to curriculum, learning experiences, and assessment?

It is likely that pressure from congregations, nonformal initiatives, and developments in distance learning will force the shift from an instructional paradigm to a learning paradigm and sensitize us to the need for internationalization of the curriculum. Before substantial change is possible, the academy may require a managed curriculum that challenges the right of faculty to have *exclusive* control over curriculum development. Similarly, as the focus shifts from instruction to learning, from preparation to development, from passive students to adult learners, the nature of admissions criteria will become a significant area of discussion. Dan Aleshire notes that the acceptance rate for applicants to seminaries is about 90 percent. The fact that most evangelical seminaries are tuition driven likely contributes to this inflated statistic. He suggests that more productive admissions criteria will require evidence of a range of aptitude (e.g., intellectual ability, evaluated work history, indebtedness at time of application, evaluated in-ministry capacity, openness to diversity and different perspectives).

Perhaps the way forward is to discern where *God* is working. How would you answer Craig Dykstra's three basic questions: What is God doing in the world? What do churches have to be like that are responding to what God is doing in the world? What is theological education doing to equip leaders for the church that is responding to what God is doing in the world?

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