

**Theological Education and the Crises,
Distinctions and Goals of Professional Education:
A Literature Review in Process**

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Abstract

This paper is part of a preparatory literature review for my dissertation research. The dissertation proposal is titled “The Emphasis on Professional Preparation in Student Assessment for the Master of Divinity Degree.” This topic requires an understanding of the issues concerning the degree to which a seminary education constitutes professional education. Therefore, this paper examines the literature dealing with the current nature of professional education in higher education and compares it to the literature on graduate theological education. The paper focuses on the current crises of professionalism and the demands for change in the curriculum of professional education. Then it explores the complexities of the nature of professionalism, the goals and values of professional education, and the major challenges to those goals. Another literature review in progress concerns the assessment practices of professional education and theological education.

Higher education in the United States is increasingly pushed towards educating for the professions. At the same time, professionalism itself has been in a state of crisis. The combination creates great scrutiny of the academy, resulting in pressure for curriculum change. The ensuing literature debates the nature of professionalism and the corresponding educational goals of professional preparation programs in higher education.

Theological education is not immune to the demands for change that come from the professionalization of society. The literature demonstrates that the professional nature of theological education has been increasingly debated in the last two decades. The following literature review seeks to illustrate the debate over the extent to which theological education is, or is not, professional preparation. To do this, this paper first discusses crises in professionalism. Then we must look at the complexities embodied in the definition of professional. Following the examination of the distinctions, this paper will explore the literature on the unique goals of professional education and the challenges of educating towards those goals.

The Crisis of Professionalism

In the last decade, professional schools¹ have drawn increasingly critical attention. William Sullivan, a senior scholar at The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, reflects on contemporary American society after the Enron crash. He concludes, “There has never been a time when the quality of professional education was more important, or more subject to question, than the present” (Sullivan 2005,27). As a result of crises in professional practice, great attention is directed at how professional schools are preparing future

¹ For this paper, “professional schools” or “professional education” will refer to undergraduate and graduate schools and their degree programs that are designed to prepare people for entry into professional careers. It will not refer to continuing education for those already working in a profession.

practitioners for professional service (Hough, Mouw, and Franklin 2001,114; Sullivan 2005). This pressure results in the schools continually reviewing their program purposes and curricular validity. Theological schools have not been immune to the crises, the resulting critical attention and the calls for change.

Crises and Demands on Professional Education

The external pressures for change in professional preparation education come from several sources. The most obvious demands result from the highly publicized scandals involving professionals. The damage caused by these scandals centers around a break in trust. The public loses its trust in professionals to provide expert competence with impeccable responsibility. The professions depend on the public trust for much of their power and legal privileges (Sullivan 2005,62). When public trust is broken due to the profession's failure to uphold its social responsibility, a crisis follows. This results in the educational preparation of their members becoming a target of scrutiny (Hough, Mouw, and Franklin 2001,114; Sullivan 2005,2-5).

Other crises during the last decade have also increased the scrutiny of professionalism and thus, professional education. For example, with the rise of state and healthcare industry control, medical professionals have experienced a dramatic decline of sovereignty. They have also suffered a decline in authority with the medical information boom on the web. Another example is the nationwide accounting scandals that have disrupted financial markets and led to the collapse of major corporations. Also, the rise of highly publicized and bizarre litigations has hastened the continuing loss of respect for the legal profession and its role in society (Sullivan 2005,42-43,58).

External sources of critical pressure on professional schools also stems from the growth and application of new technologies and specialized knowledge (Stark and Others 1987). Some theorists predict that rapid technological development, especially the global expansion of information technology, will end the current societal dependence on professionals by making them obsolete (Sullivan 2005,43). In addition, new communications technologies may make professionals less trustworthy to perform public service. The technology allows the professional to be far removed from the realities their actions affect. Thus, according to Chambers, a critic of professionalism in relief and development work, professional errors become "easier and more dangerous" (Chambers 1997,32).

Finally, frequent and dramatic changes in professional job responsibilities also cause pressures for change in professional education. For example, population demographic changes broaden the types of clients needing to be served by the professional. In addition, shifting economic conditions add instability to job markets (Stark and Others 1987). The economic challenges actually threaten a public-serving professionalism because high-earning jobs lure the most talented away from serving the public sector (Sullivan 2005,10,27). In addition, the increasingly competitive labor market pressures professionals to compete with peers, instead of serving society cooperatively, and to prioritize profit over professional standards of excellence (Sullivan 2005,40).

Resulting Scrutiny on the Curriculum

The above crises in professionalism place demands on professional schools to change the curriculum. The goal is to graduate professionals who will be better able to cope with the societal changes and prevent further crises. Analysis of the curriculum and of the educational goals of professional degrees informs the ongoing debate about how to best prepare students towards being an ideal professional.

Professional education curriculum has always been in tension between liberal arts study and specialized vocational skills training (Lattuca and Stark 2001,4,8; Sullivan 2005,64-65). The current critical attention often focuses on this ever present professional/liberal arts curricular tension. Literature concerning professionalism and higher education for professional practice draws out this tension. Some warn of the dangers of professional over-specialization and the need for a return to a more general liberal arts approach. Others call for the opposite and the need to require greater vocational competence (Cervero 1985; Chambers 1997; Stark, Lowther, and Hagerty 1986). One study pointedly summarizes the main concern:

Will forces of specialization and professionalization move degree programs toward greater emphasis on vocational skills and knowledge, or will the need to develop individuals capable of, and prepared for, lifelong learning in their work (and private) lives reinvigorate general education and liberal studies? (Lattuca and Stark 2001,8)

Further trends in American culture also play into this curricular tension (Sullivan 2005,64). The societal demand for technical specialization pushes for a skills oriented curriculum. This social trend also reflects a utilitarianism that calls for the professions to enhance efficiency and individual satisfaction in the society. Sullivan believes that this narrow understanding of professionalism obscures civic orientation (Sullivan 2005,65).

A competing force comes from the outcry over professional scandals. These pressures demand the renewal of the ethical and civic focus of professional education. This would result in a more traditionally liberal arts approach in the curriculum. Sullivan agrees that professional schools must regain the civic focus of professionalism in order to bring needed renewal to the professions (Sullivan 2005,65,226).

Comparable Demands and Results in Theological Education

Theological schools² in the United States suffer from very similar crises and pressures as those listed above. And, as above, the crises lead people to reappraise the curriculum. For example, theological schools have also experienced critical attention due to highly publicized scandals, especially those of clergy immorality. Clergy failures and scandals challenge the schools to focus more on character formation, in line with a liberal arts curricular approach.

Sociological changes also lead to further scrutiny of the curriculum. A societal dependence on clergy for spiritual and moral leadership has decreased with the shift to our

² In this paper, “theological school” refers to Christian graduate schools of theology in the United States that grant ministerial degrees and that meet the accreditation standards of the Association of Theological Schools. The term “seminary” will be used synonymously with “theological school.”

current post-Christian, postmodern, and pluralistic culture. This leads to the economic troubles and competitiveness that cause pressure for change as mentioned above for the professions in general. It also adds to society's diminishing respect for those in vocational ministry. In addition, theological schools feel great pressure to respond to the demographic changes of their host cities. Seminaries are made up of mostly white, male students and faculty (ATS 2003, Table 2.12, 3.1). They are challenged to recruit faculty and students of color and women. They are also hard pressed to provide curriculum required to develop leadership for an increasingly pluralistic society.

The demand for technical specialization also impacts seminaries. Reflecting the sociological changes above, the church's interests have become increasingly professional and pragmatic. For example, the specialization of vocational ministry positions has rapidly increased due to the pragmatism and the growth of large churches with multiple paid staff positions that are quite specialized. Dissatisfied with seminary training, non-denominational mega-churches are now establishing their own leadership training schools. Thus, theological schools are losing their sovereignty over training clergy and ministry leaders. All these issues tend to push seminaries to provide a more skills-focused, diverse curriculum with multiple specialized degree offerings.

Among theological educators there has been expanding discussions of the need for renewal and curricular change since Farley's publication of *Theologia* in 1983. One of the central topics in the renewal debate involves the issue of the professionalization of the ministry. This debate mirrors the professional-liberal arts curriculum debates of professional education mentioned above.

Many leaders in the schools and in the church assume that theological graduate schools are professional schools (Hartley 2003, 101). They call for the improvement of the professionalism of seminary graduates. By this they mean that students should "depart with a higher measure of confidence in their ability to convene good meetings, resolve basic conflicts, preach interesting and nurturing sermons, organize and mobilize people, and carry on the ritual life of the inherited tradition with dignity, spirit and integrity" (Hough, Mouw, and Franklin 2001, 114).

Others believe the current professional paradigm of theological education is already a main source of theological education's problems. They view theological education as being fueled by economic factors and the pragmatic demands of the church. In response, the curriculum is increasingly splintered into specializations of practice. Thus, the theory-practice divide widens, character formation diminishes, and integrated theological study after knowledge of God is obscured (Cannell 2003, 21; Farley 1983, 12).

Definitions and Distinctions of the Professional

The crises and demands of professional education have produced study and debate over the definitions of professional. In the last two decades, many debates in the literature concerning the purpose and curriculum of theological education engage the issue of whether theological education should be conceived of as professional education or not. Often, the degree to which the identified problem is perceived to belong to professionalism, the professional aspects of the curriculum become the cause. Some consider the more fundamental problem to be the church's own confusion about how to define appropriate professional leadership for itself (Cannell 2003, 60). The possible definitions and distinctions of professionalism are many and complex.

Current Distinctions of the Professional

Today, the professional is no longer identified merely by a vow or by societal service in law, medicine and theology as in past centuries (Cannell 2003, 41-54). The common use of the term “profession” refers to any vocation requiring competent, skillful practice. In popular usage, “professional” remains an adjective of virtue despite the ethical failures and the crises in professionalism described above (Sullivan 2005,37). For example, career workshop promotions promise to enhance “professionalism,” and national associations describe themselves as committed to “professionalism.”

Current educational research applies the adjective “professional” liberally due to its continued desirable connotations. The term appears in the descriptions of over 2000 American doctoral dissertations written in the last decade (FirstSearch). Although nearly half of these dissertations are directed at teacher training, the vocations they consider “professions” range widely from the military to library science, childcare to journalism (FirstSearch). However, very few deal with theological education or the clergy.

Theological Education as Professional Schooling?

Note the lists of occupations studied by two significant research studies concerning professional education. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching is currently engaged in a national comparative study of professional education (Sullivan 2005). The study concerns higher education for the preparation of doctors, nurses, lawyers, engineers, and clergy. The Stark professional outcomes research compares educational goals from the education literature of twelve professional fields: architecture, business administration, dentistry, education, engineering, journalism, law, library science, medicine, nursing, pharmacy, and social work (Stark et al. 1986, 235-236). Of these two significant studies of professional education, one included theological education and the other did not.

The Association of Theological Schools (ATS), the accrediting body for theological education in the United States and Canada, generally defines theological education as professional (Aleshire 2003; Klimoski 2003; Sullivan 2005). Klimoski, a member of an ATS Task Force, writes concerning the Master of Divinity degree. He says it purposes to train ministers as professionals because “the classical criteria of a profession hold true.” The professional has “mastered a body of expert knowledge, demonstrated proficiency and artistry as a skilled practitioner after lengthy training, is accountable to a code of ethics, and is committed to a lifetime of learning” (Klimoski 2003, 44). This, according to Klimoski, describes the degreed ministry leader.

Kelsey admits that theological schools are usually classified as professional but argues that this is highly problematic (Kelsey 1992, 161). He admits that denominations support schools to prepare competent ministry leaders, and that seminary charters state that this is their founding purpose. However, Kelsey believes the defining goal of theological schools should be “to seek to understand God more truly” for its own sake, not to prepare students to enter a career (Kelsey 1992, 15). He argues that this non-utilitarian goal would actually guide schools to prepare church leaders in the best manner since churches need leaders with sound theology instead of skills that become quickly outdated in our ever changing society (Kelsey 1992, 162).

For Kelsey, church leadership should not be characterized as professional for the reasons below, which are dependent on his definition of professional (Kelsey 1992, 245-247).

- (1) A theological degree in and of itself should not set apart seminary graduates from others for church leadership.
- (2) Graduates do not necessarily possess specialized knowledge and skills that distinguish them from laity.
- (3) Church leaders do have a sense of calling, but calling is not limited to seminary graduates.
- (4) The whole church is to be marked by service to others, not the leadership alone serving “clients.”
- (5) Not all church leadership is a full time career.
- (6) All the church should engage in worship and service, leaving no room for the professional autonomy of exercising specialized knowledge and skill.

In direct contrast to Kelsey, Klimoski favors professionalism as a helpful approach in renewing the goals of theological education. He believes that professionalism can aid theological schools in the assessment of Master of Divinity students. It could provide the clear goal of preparing students “to exercise public religious leadership at a level of informed, disciplined skill that distinguishes her or him from others who are involved in the work of the church” (Klimoski 2003, 44).

Klimoski considers it highly problematic that theological educators are not sure church leaders *are* professionals in the classical sense (Klimoski 2003, 44). He considers the confusion to derive from the fact that society does not license ministers as it does other professionals and that anyone can start a church. Therefore, he reasons, theological educators default to training seminarians merely intellectually because they are not sure what distinguishes the professional minister from any other well-educated person (Klimoski 2003, 45). What is needed is a universally defined professionalism for ministry.

Professional Education Defined by Professional Ethics

Much of the current literature on professional education, apart from that of theological education, defines the “professional” in some generally congruent ways. The term “professional” usually describes people in a particular vocation in association with high standards of knowledge, skill, general behavior, and attitude. Emphasis on the affective domain and on ethical practice adds to the uniqueness of the definition of the professional over other employees. The use of the term professional involves ethical connotations that link its definition to “the underlying assumptions and value systems that currently provide the foundation for work place culture” (Clinite 2000).

In the defining publication of Education as a Profession in 1956, Lieberman describes eight characteristics of a profession. Most of his attributes are still central to descriptions found in the literature today. However, the strength of Lieberman’s explicit ethical implications for professionalism are no longer common in the literature. For example, he writes of the defining professional characteristic of being responsibility for professional judgments, for actions and for the priority of service over economic gain (Cannell 2003,40).

Ethical language is much more muted in current literature, usually referring simply to the fact that professionals serve the public (Sullivan 2005,2-4, 27). Instead of professionalism being based on social trust, today's notions are usually of the professional "as a purveyor of expert services" who is not bound by "professions of social responsibility" (Sullivan 2005,9).

Not surprisingly, the ethical issues named in older definitions of professionalism concern the very moral and ethical issues behind many of the current crises. Thus, scholars inevitably define the *ideal* state of what professionalism ought to be, rather than the current practice, when writing about education for the professions. Some offer ethical standards to be re-established both in the field and in preparatory education (Shulman 1997; Sullivan 2005). For example, ideally professionals would bring the complexity of technical processes and competent work within the ethical sphere of a moral social service (Jarvis 1983,34; Sullivan 2005,180-181).

The critiques of professionalism in ministry similarly focus on the ethical. Even in the ministry, the professional is now understood "in a largely functionalist and individualistic way" (Kelsey 1992,94). According to today's standards, professionals seek to meet specific needs of individual clients. However, this view of the professional is inappropriate for the ministry. Instead, seminaries desire to develop ministry leadership that will help the church function as a healthy, united community where all members have responsibilities in which to serve one another. Biblically defined relationships in the church are not to be providers to clients.

For seminary communities, the cultural values of a pragmatic, competitive and individualistic professionalism can have a devastating impact of the ethos of the school. Instead of valuing a Christian community of service and of the pursuit of knowing God, the school may become focused on training for effective and successful practice. Thus, the community would wrongly value "what sustains clerical careerism over what cultivates the capacity for critical reflection" (Kelsey 1992, 56).

Power and Control Issues Defining the Professional

Descriptions of professionalism usually include examples of privilege, power and control. In a foundational book on professional education, Jarvis defines professions as "occupations which seek in some ways both the mastery of an identifiable body of knowledge and the control of its application in practice" (Jarvis 1983,22). More recent research similarly describes professionals as "protectors and disseminators" of the guild's knowledge (Brooks 1997). Lee S. Shulman, President of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, simply describes professionals as unique because they serve others based on an education not available to most people (Shulman 1997,4). This control, protection, and privilege of the professional stands out compared to other occupations.

Society grants professionals distinctive amounts of privilege. Traditionally, the professions have been largely sheltered from "consumers, managers, and intense competition" (Sullivan 2005,13). As a result, they possess power from prestige, financial resources, influence, authority, and vested interests (Chambers 1997,32).

The literature describes professionals as functioning with relative autonomy since their professional associations, or guilds, police themselves. The guilds set their own standards for quality work, ethical behavior, regular evaluation, and continuing education (Cannell 2003,40) Sullivan provides further examples of autonomy and control. He describes the

professions as operating from a structure of “corporate membership, controlled markets for their services, and monopolistic practices in training and recruitment” (Sullivan 2005,1). Chambers believes the autonomy and power that professionals possess in our society conditions their perceptions and causes resistance to new insights and realities. “*Power hinders learning*” (Chambers 1997,32).

Power and control issues are not discussed in the theological education literature directly. Accreditation and denominational ordination do provide standards of knowledge and skill for those obtaining degrees or ordination. However, these two forms of privileged certification are often not required to enter vocational ministry leadership. Unlike the professions described above, there is little unified control over ministry leadership.

Some leaders in theological education desire seminary graduates to have more authority and autonomy, like traditional professionals. They prefer graduates to be more distinguishable from the laity in the church by their knowledge and skill (Klimoski 2003, 44). They would also like ATS and the church to provide more control over practice via comprehensive norms for continuing theological education (Hough, Mouw, and Franklin 2001,114).

Goals of Professional Education

The various definition distinctives described above illustrate many of the goals and challenges of professional education. In the United States, unlike most of the world, graduate level education is required for most professional membership (Shulman 1997,7; Sullivan 2005,25). The trend in professional education has been for the academy to assume greater control than practitioners over the training of the pre-professional (Sullivan 2005,25-27). Sullivan describes professional schools as institutions that bridge both the academy and the practitioners’ arena. However, professional education literature usually finds fault with higher education for not being connected enough with those on the field.

Views on the importance and role of higher education to prepare people for professional occupations vary significantly. Sullivan believes that professional schooling is necessary to shape students with professional identity (Sullivan 2005,26). Shulman, however, admits the possibility that “academic knowledge is essential only as an *entitlement* to practice and is not functionally necessary for practice” (Shulman 1997,6 emphasis in text). Chambers infers that the ruin of the professionals begins with how they are prepared in higher education (Chambers 1997).

General Goals of Professional Education

Professional education seeks to graduate people ready to be competent practitioners. When discussing the educational goal of competency, most theorists divide it into the three classic learning domains of the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. Current literature on professional education names the categories with terms such as academic/cognitive knowledge, technical/skills ability, and ethical/integrity attitudes (e.g., Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching 2004; Jarvis 1983; Klimoski 2003,39; Shulman 1997,4-6; Sullivan 2005).

For example, Jarvis summarizes specific elements of professional competency

under the categories of knowledge, skills and attitudes. According to Jarvis, the professional must have knowledge and understanding in four areas: the relevant academic disciplines, the psycho-motor essentials, interpersonal relationships, and the professional ethic. Competency in skill requires the ability to perform the psycho-motor procedures required of the job and to interact appropriately with others. Competency in professional attitude comprises two areas: (1) knowledge of and “emotive commitment to professionalism,” which includes adoption of the ethical values necessary for practice and the social ability to work with others in the field; and (2) the willingness to perform to the guild standards for good practice (Jarvis 1983,35).

Sullivan describes the ideal professional education as consisting of three “apprenticeships:” (1) the cognitive, which includes the knowledge base and habits of the mind; (2) the psycho-motor; which is the competent practitioner’s body of skills, with the recognition that they are often tacit; and (3) the affective, meaning the values and attitudes of the professional community (Sullivan 2005,208). Sullivan views these three apprenticeships as reflecting the contending emphases within all professional education (Sullivan 2005,209).

The three learning domains that Jarvis and Sullivan describe are based on the three defining sets of core professional education values: “the values of the academy, the values of professional practice, and the ethical-social values of professional identity” (Sullivan 2005,28). The distinctions between these three sets of values provide the outline for investigating the professional education goals.

The Values of the Academy

One core value of professionalism today concerns academics since most professions require mandatory higher education degrees for entrance (Sullivan 2005,4). Before the advent of the modern university, the professions relied on personal apprenticeship for preparation to join a profession. Apprenticeship focused on practical and ethical training. The entry of professional preparation into the universities signaled the changes to reliance on classroom instruction and to an intellectual training focus.

The academy claims to provide two major advantages over personal apprenticeship. One benefit consists of higher education’s systematic and efficient transmission of information. Secondly, because the university is also a place of research, the academy also promises “some guarantee that the knowledge communicated to students is reputable and up-to-date” (Sullivan 2005,197).

Challenges to the Values of the Academy

The academy also has disadvantages over personal apprenticeship. The university setting is isolated from the actual professional field of practice. Although the academy facilitates training in analytic thinking well, the classroom proves to be much less helpful for developing “practical skills and capacity for professional judgment” (Sullivan 2005,195-198). Sullivan states that studies show most learning for professional practice occurs in the context of actual engagement on the field. Yet, the professions have largely given the educational task of preparing people to the academy. Ironically, they then expect graduates to be competent directly out of school.

Chambers sharply critiques the professional value of the academy. He finds the

academy to be at the center of the highly problematic culture of the relief and development profession. Chambers concludes that the profession's central problem consists of a culture of professionalism that "creates and sustains its own reality" (Chambers 1997,33). Chambers feels universals, specializations and reductionism are too heavily valued in schooling, and thus in the professions. Therefore, as a result of academic training, professionals simplify complex realities on the field. Reality to them becomes only that which is measured and counted. This then prevents professionals from serving the actual, highly complex, diverse, and dynamic realities of their tasks (Chambers 1997,33, 54).

Theological Education and the Values of the Academy

Some critics of theological education also blame the academy for being too analytical and too specialized. According to Farley, this leads to experiences of theological education "as an atomism of subjects without a clear rationale, end, or unity" (Farley 1983, 16). To Farley, the values of the academy have led to a fragmentation of theological study. Unfortunately, this loss of unity has placed professionalism as the rationale for theological education (Farley 1983, 109).

The Values of Professional Practice

In addition to academic courses, professional education usually consists of both "practical" courses on skills and supervised internships. Sullivan describes the process as "academically controlled apprenticeship: from the academic study of texts and examples, to the observation of practice, to assistance with practice, to highly supervised and monitored practice, to increasingly autonomous practice" (Sullivan 2005,xi). Shulman echoes Sullivan's linear order in stating that students must have a knowledge base of theory and research from the academy before attempting practice. Shulman reasons that academic knowledge only becomes "professional knowledge" when it passes the test of proving valuable in practice (Shulman 1997,4).

Shulman and Sullivan are ultimately describing a theory/practice split in professional education. The idea that professional education requires this linear learning progression and theory/practice split is very common in the literature (Stark, Lowther, and Hagerty 1986,22). Many educators believe this constitutes a defining, yet unavoidable, challenge in professional education.

Challenges to the Values of Professional Practice

Shulman believes that theories are extraordinarily powerful. However, in what reflects Chamber's critique above, he regrets that theories are "frequently so remote from the particular conditions of professional practice that the novice professional-in-training rarely appreciates their contributions" (Shulman 1997,6). Higher education's main solution to this problem resides in supervised clinical, or field, experience. However, since field experience usually occurs at the end of the degree program, students tend to devalue their theoretical training because it does not easily or directly apply to their field work. This results in creating

even more of a divide between the theoretical and the clinical/practical (Shulman 1997,7).

Theological Education and the Values of Professional Practice

Theological education is generally concerned with shaping knowledge, spirituality and character. However, due to its historical link to the university, it largely follows the dominant university model of requiring mastery of theoretical knowledge before attaining practical skills. Sullivan criticizes theological education for its tendency to demote the teaching of professional skills and judgment to “secondary, ‘applied’ status” (Sullivan 2005,204, 217). This demotion further widens the theory-practice divide.

The Theory-Practice Division and the Values of Professional Practice

The traditional university pedagogy of liberal arts education still prevails in professional education (Stark and Others 1987). Theoretical knowledge is typically studied analytically and removed from any field context. Integration of liberal arts studies and professional learning “has rarely been vigorously pursued” in higher education (Lattuca and Stark 2001,8). This separation gains strength from the fact that, in general, the practical and academic professions themselves critically judge each other.

The academics may accuse the practical professions of being ‘too close to their practical work to be able to take a wider view.’ The practitioners may retort that the academic disciplines are ‘too theoretical and too far from practical realities.’ (Chambers 1997,34)

The Theory-Practice Division in Professional Education

Part of Sullivan’s solution for reinventing professionalism concerns the necessary integration of analytical learning with lessons from professional practice (Sullivan 2005,199). The university model already stresses analytical reasoning skills. These same skills could be better used for assessing the practical skills of student imitations of professional performance in simulated or imagined practice (Sullivan 2005,206). This type of educational structure would require a vast change from current curriculum practices.

Shulman approaches the theory/practice gap in higher education from a different direction. He believes the tension in higher education between the liberal and the pragmatic is presumed for poor reasons. He looks to professional education to *model* the solution. He blames faulty perceptions of learning on the part of the faculty for the troublesome gap. For example, the liberal arts faculty distrusts that which is labeled “professional” because, for them, liberal learning is supposed to be “pursued for its own sake, and cannot be subordinated to the aims of application or vocation” (Shulman 1997,1). Shulman believes the liberal arts would improve educationally by becoming more professional through the integration of the academic with purposeful practice and application (Shulman 1997,1-2).

Shulman’s solution to the theory-practice divide involves the exercise of informed

judgment. Informed judgment “bridges the universal terms of theory and the gritty particularities of situated practice (Shulman 1997,4). The challenge, then, for professional education is to help students gain the skill of exercising professional judgment. Here Shulman’s description addresses Chamber’s harsh critique that professionals create their own reality. He agrees with Chambers that theoretical knowledge is based on simplification of the world. However, he argues that the exercise of judgment ties it to the much more variable specifics of everyday life in practice.

The Theory-Practice Division in Theological Education

The curricular tension between liberal arts study and vocational skills training has a long history in theological education. In the early nineteenth century, theological study took on professional goals when it joined with medicine and law in the developing modern research university. In embracing the specifically social function of training church leadership for the good of *society*, theological education embraced the theory-to-practice paradigm of professional education (Kelsey 1992,88).

Conrad Cherry’s history of the divinity schools shows regular, but largely unsuccessful, attempts to bridge the theory-practice divide as the schools pursued the often conflicting purposes of both the university and the church. “The alliance between the aims of the university and those of the church, an alliance necessary for the theoretical and practical education of professional ministers, would prove to be an awkward one” (Cherry 1995, 155).

“Almost every major book or article on the topic of renewal in theological education mentions the theory-practice relationship, usually in problematic terms” (Cannell 2003,155). Seminaries typically divide departments along the theory-practice categories. “Practical theology” courses are often taught by practitioners from outside the academy or by those with fewer academic credentials. This increases the divide.

According to Kelsey, the theory-practice divide and tension is unavoidable and irresolvable because theological schools are characterized by two competing models (Kelsey 1992, 64, 75). The *paideia* model is promoted as the model of choice for seminaries by Farley in his highly influential critique of theological education (Farley 1983). This model emphasizes character formation, affective understanding of God, and identity change through conceptual growth. The opposing university model supports the prevalent scientific research base for higher education. It focuses on the increase of knowledge from research and the preparation of the professional. Using these two models, the defining tension is not between the theoretical and the practical but between educating for formation and educating to gain information and skill (Kelsey 1992, 96). Kelsey concludes that theological schooling needs both models in order to provide identity formation, academically astute critical inquiry and professional preparation. However, neither model provides what he thinks should be the defining goal of theological education: “to understanding God truly” (Kelsey 1992,193).

Klimoski takes a more optimistic view of the theory/practice separation than most. Since professional schools highly value graduate licensure, their educational goals are already oriented towards the application of knowledge. Therefore, Klimoski believes professional education, which includes theological education for him, has a much less problematic theory-practice gap than the rest of higher education. In addition, he notes that the practitioners who provide the field supervision do participate in the educational process along

with the academicians (Klimoski 2003,40).

The Values of Professional Identity

Professional socialization is an intentional aspect of professional education. It involves the purposeful fostering of customary professional attitudes and commitments in the students (Stark and Others 1987). Ideally, professional socialization would also influence the moral character and vision of students in order to “guide their practice and provide a prism of justice and virtue through which to reflect on their actions” (Shulman 1997,5-6). Professional education literature generally discusses the shaping of the student’s professional identity in four areas: the visional, the ethical, the guild, and the learner.

Visional Identity

A core aspect of both professional and ministry identity involves a personal vision for, or sense of inner calling to, the particular professional for lifelong vocation (Sullivan 2005,21). Some research demonstrates that professionals will reject consumerism and the market driven notion of work as a result of a higher vision of their work (Stratemeyer 2001). However, professionals also often consider their vocation to be “a means to status, power and wealth” (Chambers 1997,33). Professional education places a high value on the students having an internal calling to serve society in their vocation. Many theological schools even require a written essay of testimony about having such a calling as part of the application process.

Ethical Identity

Typically, the values of the academy and of professional practice have preeminence in professional education. However, some scholars believe the fostering of a professional ethical identity needs to take primacy in the curriculum, especially in light of the cultural climate of increasing distrust of professionals (Bruhn et al. 2002). Jarvis observes that since professionalism is an “ideology of commitment to mastery in order to serve,” it “demands a moral commitment to a way of life, perhaps best exemplified by the Hippocratic Oath or the ordination vows of the priest” (Jarvis 1983,127). Ideally, the professional, by definition, will do no harm.

Theological education literature tends not to address ethical issues by that name. Instead it speaks of moral, emotional, spiritual and character formation in relation to matters of both public and private behavior (Wood 2003). Theological education assumes one is growing in knowledge of God as well as obedience to God; that the intimate experience of growth in the knowledge of God “obligates ethical behavior” (Cannell 2003,40). In contrast, professional education literature usually refers to public behavior under the ethical category. Cannell points to the increasingly technological society that demands specialized skills to such a degree that it overwhelms the need for “professional character and commitment to values over against self-interest” (Cannell 2003,41). These societal demands challenge the professional and ministry leader alike.

Challenges to Educating for Ethical Identity

Several recent authors discuss why professional education seems weakest in the area of ethical identity formation. Many blame higher education. In a national bestseller, Lasch blames much of society's problems on the university's method of educating almost solely for analytical thinking (Lasch 1995). In addition, he argues that the analytical university culture breeds arrogance and separation from ordinary people instead of cultivating a public service ethic of traditional professionalism (Lasch 1995,180-184).

Sullivan takes Lasch's critique a step farther. He argues that values antithetical to those ideal for professionalism are fostered by the university's educational approaches. The resulting culture is one where "innovation is valued over continuity, flexibility and variety over loyalty, technical intelligence and instrumental finesse over character and moral cultivation, iconoclasm over reverence" (Sullivan 2005,216-217). To the extent that the curriculum favors any of these, the professional ethic is lost.

Guild Identity

In addition to the ethical aspect of professional socialization, professional commitments include membership in guild-like communities of peers. As a community, professionals are able "to exert their considerable social influence on the basis of their claim to expert knowledge and skill" (Sullivan 2005,11). Thus, individuals are somewhat dependent on the public reputation of their guild to secure jobs. In the guilds, professionals set standards for self-monitoring and self-regulating their work. This allows professionals to operate with autonomy and with the privileges granted by the broader society's recognition of them. (Shulman 1997,5)

Students have much to gain from joining their professional community. However, the guild mentality can also be limiting. It can require "professional norms that rule out certain domains of thought" (Ruddick 2001, 8). For example, these norms can separate one's emotional life from one's professional life. Guild mentality may also be isolationistic, not encouraging professional interaction outside its own membership (Cannell 2003, 32).

For theological education, the guild mentality deems those with graduate degrees from theological schools to be the experts of specialized knowledge and the ability to apply it to practice. This is theologically problematic according to Kelsey. All the church is to practice and live out theology as an interdependent community distinguished by service to one another (Kelsey 1992, 202). Knowledge and practice are not supposed to be distinguishing of only the leadership. In addition, leadership of the church is not autonomous (Kelsey 1992, 247). Slightly contrary to Kelsey's broad statements, however, many denominations reserve specific responsibilities for ordained clergy.

Theological schools are very concerned that one type of guild-like identity be formed in their students. This identity is not one of professional ministry, though. It is the identity of being a member of the Christian church worldwide and accepting the responsibilities of a member. In common seminary terms this concerns the need for student spiritual formation. One reason for the heightened concern is that students today do not necessarily come from solid church backgrounds. Therefore, "The seminary is being asked to do things it really hasn't done much before. . . . to provide remedial work on what it means to be a believer before God and a community of believers, . . ." (Aleshire 1999,111)

Learner Identity

A final core identity for professional socialization is that of the learner. Professionals are ideally characterized as being life-long learners. Jarvis' definition holds that the professional is "one who continually seeks the mastery of the branch of learning upon which his occupation is based, so that he may offer a service to his client" and effectively apply the new knowledge (Jarvis 1983,27-28).

Due to the continual state of change within professional occupations, the professional standard for excellence requires practitioners to keep abreast of new developments (Jarvis 1983,39). This requires constant learning. After the initial degrees are awarded by the academy, professionals in nearly every field are required by their boards to engage in regularly scheduled, institutionalized "continuing education" in order to maintain their credentials.

In addition to learning in formal continuing education, professionals must also have the capacity to learn from the experience and reflection of their own practice (Shulman 1997,5-8; Sullivan 2005,246-250). Since professionalism is defined in part by self-regulation, both peer and self assessment are vital learning activities of professional practice (Jarvis 1983,103). Therefore, professional socialization involves the development of an ability to learn well from experience and from peers and the maintenance of a highly motivated disposition towards learning.

Developing learner identity may be more often the ideal than the reality in actual professional socialization. Chambers harshly criticizes professionals on this very issue. He accuses professionals of causing harm due to their inability to learn. In addition, he believes continuing education only furthers professional resistance to new insights and realities (Chambers 1997,32).

For theological education, the development of student dispositions for lifelong learning may be considered one of the most important tasks of the educational institution (Cannell 2003, 25). Learning is a responsibility of the faithful Christian for growth in maturity. It can even be considered an act of worship as the learner seeks to grow in knowledge and love of God (Cannell 2003,42). Ironically, the ministry is unique compared to the professions in that it has no systematic evaluation of performance and no requirements for continuing education (Cannell 2003, 82).

Conclusion

The literature on professional education varies greatly between scholars who are optimistic about the current innovative educational practices and those who blame these practices for problems in society. However, many of the authors we have considered, including several theological educators, would prefer to educate towards the ideal representations of professionalism. The same can be said of theological education literature and schooling. This literature review comparing the crises, distinctions, and goals of professional education with those of theological education demonstrates that the two have many similar issues and challenges. Hence, it is potentially profitable for the theological educator to examine the benefits, the problems and the proposed solutions in the broader literature on professional education.

Although there are benefits in the comparison, there are also cautions. As our culture continues to move towards a more pragmatic and specialized professionalism, theological

educators must bear in mind the concerns raised about professionalism and evaluate the analogies. As a result, theological education likely needs to make some intentional departures from the course of professional education generally in order to develop ministry leaders who will lead and serve the whole people of God.

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