Forming the Theological Imagination: Strategies of Integration in Theological Education

Lawrence Golemen, The Alban Institute

From the Editor’s Desk

In The 2005 Auburn study of faculty at ATS schools, the two primary concerns that theological educators had about their teaching were critical thinking and integration. In this, the first issue of Spotlight on Theological Education, we take up the second of these concerns as an issue with which each school and faculty must grapple. This Spotlight is an initiative of the new Theological Education Steering Committee at the AAR, which is dedicated to the academic and professional development of educators in theological schools.

The articles here address the issue of integrative teaching and learning from several educational contexts: some come from denominational seminaries, some from university divinity schools, and others from interdenominational consortia or seminaries. They discuss the multiple strategies needed to tackle this complex subject. Several educators lift up organizing rubrics such as practical theology (Cook, religious tradition (Benson), or a new global reality (Hopkins) that reshape classroom, communal, and curricular goals and strategies. Some teacher-scholars focus on classroom pedagogies (Butler, Conde-Frazier, Jones), others on communal pedagogies (Bartle, Rhodes), and others on cross-curricular strategies (Liebert, Hymans, Russell). Each of these reflective practitioners demonstrates a fluid and adaptive teaching practice that responds to the changing student bodies, vocational trajectories, and goals of integrative teaching and learning in theological education.

I was fortunate to be part of the recent Carnegie study of clergy education among Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, now published as Educating Clergy. There, we developed several frameworks for discussing integrative teaching practices in the theological and rabbinical schools we visited. The first we called the “four signature pedagogies” in theological education. Pedagogies of interpretation challenge students to engage sacred and historical texts with critical and linguistic skill and with their own questions, in order to find their significance for a specific “horizon of meaning”: be it historical or contemporary, local or global. Pedagogies of formation guide students into the spiritual practices of a tradition in order to nurture an awareness of the divine, form the practice of holiness, and shape their pastoral leadership. Pedagogies of contextualization develop students’ analysis and understanding of social, cultural, and congregational contexts and bring students into creative and transformative encounters with them. Pedagogies of performance develop complex pastoral skills and judgment through the reenactment of clergy roles and tasks, the development of their own style of clergy practice, and the demonstration and internalization of standards of excellence within a practice. Effective teaching and learning, we observed, draw students into one or more of these practices through a disciplinary field or subject matter.

In these articles, you will see similar expertise at work, as these educators move back and forth between these and other pedagogies. One educator reframes the entire theological interpretive task in light of a radically different global context (Hopkins); another relates the ethics and stance of interpretation to students’ religious cultures and contexts (Butler). One teacher-scholar relates vocational and spiritual formation to communal analysis (Liebert); another develops theological imagination through rhetorical gestures and performance (Jones). One educator introduces us to the orchestration of interpretation, context, and performance throughout one school’s curriculum (Hymans); and another tells the story of how one seminary reshaped its entire curriculum and pedagogies around interdisciplinary and contextualism (Russell). I could go on, but already you see how integrative teaching embeds more than one of these pedagogies.

Another paradigm from the Carnegie study that helps one think about integration is that of the three apprenticeships—the intellectual, skills, and identity apprenticeships—that shape all professional education, from law and medicine to clergy and engineering (Sullivan, 2005). These apprenticeships distinguish the professional school from the graduate department in the university, because educating the professions requires concurrent teaching practices that integrate the cognitive, practice, and ethics/identity standards of a given professional domain. For example, discrete professional skills—like medical or pastoral diagnosis, and the ethics and norms of a profession—like the confidentiality of a good therapist or cleric, are vital to the education and formation of the professional mind, imagination, and disposition. Because many professional schools feel inadequate to engage professional ethics and identity, they are looking to seminaries and divinity schools to learn about pedagogies that integrate complex knowledge, professional competencies, and a personal identification with a profession’s ethics and mission—what traditionally has been called “formation.”

Practices that integrate the three apprenticeships of professional education abound on these pages. There is a description here of a personal and theological metasem through cross-cultural learning that integrates newfound knowledge and identity (Conde-Frazier). There is an argument for introducing critical, historical knowledge in ways that do not demolish but expand prescriptive piety and identity (Butler). One educator describes the common life and ethos of a school—including shared table and worship—as embodying a relational epistemology that shapes professional identity and the knowledge of God (Bartle). Another pedagogist relates identity-forming, spiritual practices to broader community practices of learning and worship (Liebert). One field education program has the commitment to integrate...
SAINt PAUL SCHOOL of Theology

Pamela D. Couture, Saint Paul School of Theology

Theories and theologies embedded in these practices, theologially interpret them, and propose strategic action. The applied theologian trusts that the validity of the theology will yield good practice; the practical theologian uses practice yielded by theology as the norm that tests the integrity of theological interpretation. SPST’s faculty has a long tradition of team-teaching experience in which all reflect on practice. Whether a professor’s theological reflection on practice is derived by applied theological methods or practical theological methods does not neatly divide between those located in the “classical” and “practical” disciplines. Some faculty in “classical” areas use practical theological methods; some faculty in “practise of ministry” areas use applied methods.

Theory and science. Practical theology developed a dialogue between the sciences, especially psychology, sociology, anthropology, biology, and economics. Practical theologians may engage original research, such as congregational studies, or may evaluate and theologically interpret the sciences. Such theological research is brought into conversation with theology through empirical (Van der Ven) or hermeneutical (Browning) methods. SPST has engaged scientific research, and the learning environment will become increasingly important. Scientific formations in Wesleyan tradition, in ecumenical tradition, and in opposition to or contrast with these traditions can be found among and with students, faculty, and staff at Saint Paul.

SPST’s current pedagogical experiment. The MDiv curriculum implemented in 2005 sustains SPST’s historic pedagogical values but recognizes that the learning environment has changed. Most theological disciplines today are inherently disciplinary, and faculty articulate the way their discipline does interdisciplinary work. Team-teaching disciplinary courses cultivate the curriculum, bringing this interdisciplinary work to fruition. In the past, the theory-practice integration model was depicted by some as the MDiv requires “Engaging World Religions” so that all students explore interfaith dialogue. The Cleaver Program, housing alumni Emmanuel Cleaver II, a United Methodist pastor, mayor of Kansas City, and, now, United States congressman, explores the church’s relationship to the political world. In this sense, it creates “public theology” (Martin). In SPST’s “Aesthetic and Critical Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology of the Church in a World Context.”

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How Religious Tradition Serves Theological Education

Richard Benson, St. John’s Seminary

Q QUESTION: “Why do I do theology?”

Those of us who enjoyed Catholic parochial education prior to the Second Vatican Council would recognize the dialogue above as a very traditional method of Catholic religious education based on the popular and almost ubiquitous “Catechism of the Church.” The caricature of Catholic religious education that many non-Catholics have been able to experience through the play Let’s Make a Catechism, although a bit over the top, is humorously somewhat frighteningly authentic. However, it is clear that the tradition of memorizing the questions and answers in a catechism was honored for centuries in the Catholic and Eastern Christian communities as a trusted method of religious education, especially of youth and converts. Unfortunately, this particular tradition was never suggested to be as important or as necessary in any real life taking place in an educational arena that is artificially circumscribed! Is it at all possible that, of all things, religious tradition just might provide an integrating framework that helps form an authentic and useful theological imagination? Would it not more likely do just the opposite? Before we rush to judgment, let’s take a closer look.

Without moving into a complex and systematic analysis of exactly what comprises “religious tradition,” I would venture that, in general, religious tradition can define the space where legitimate theological inquiry can happen. In fact, it could be argued that without a tradition, integration is impossible. Without a tradition integration might be nothing more than a narcissistic enterprise. One is reminded of the fact that in the wonderful play The Fiddler on the Roof, the father, Tevye, did his remarkably honest and powerful theological reflections within his own religious tradition.

For example, in our seminary the definition of theological inquiry proposed in the departmental statement is that theological inquiry, which has been called “theological imagination,” continues to be blessed and thrive. (I have the privilege of working in a Catholic seminary that resembles the church it serves.)

Bibliography


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Teaching and Learning Scripture as if We Remember Why
We Cared about It in the First Place

James T. Butler, Fuller Theological Seminary

Perhaps this kind of Adurburanum's characteristically of all professional education, but certainly it is familiar to those engaged in theological studies. Some portion of our students have come to us with an introductory theology already begun in undergraduate school. But virtually everyone we teach comes to us from a church, synagogue, or college organization in which they originally became immersed or convicted about our subject. Not a few of our students are beginning a second career, pursuing at considerable cost and dislocation something that they feel is more fulfilling or more important than what they had done before. And yet, we find, we must disturb their enthusiasm with foundational problems and formidable truths. As one of my departmental colleagues once put it, in defense of the substantial hours devoted to biblical studies in the curriculum, "But they have so much to untangle!"

On Testing Our Imagery: Reconstruction or Transformation?

Surely all worthwhile education requires iconoclasm. However much we may want to promote a relatively incremental growth in knowledge and mastery and maturity, we recognize the acute need to deconstruct false or inadequate understandings. Indeed, it might seem that the more intuitive order for these tasks is to begin by "clearing the ground," modeling our work as construction that must be preceded by demolition. After all, if the challenge is not sufficiently radical, if it does not rout the defense mechanisms that always protect cherished ideas, the result will either be stiffened resistance or a superfluous accommodation. So, whether we proceed with concomitant or unholy glee, we fill our lectures and our reading lists with all of the problems, we eschew easy apologies, and (to use an expression I heard from an appreciative student) we "blow the kiddies out of the tub."

But as I look back over 30 years of teaching, I recognize how often such therapeutic "demolition" has unintended consequences. Some students, usually those of a more academic bent, are quickly won over to their professors' perspective, and begin to acquire the critical tools that will distance them from the cultural womb that produced them. Other students will have to grapple with a professional process enough to gain a patina of sophistication, but, faced with the demands and predilections of the theological consumer culture, they will put together the nuts and bolts of their eventual practice in ways that are largely unaffected by their professors' insights. Finally, a few others simply will become skeptical about theological education, get the required degree, and then quite intentionally fulfill their professors' worst fears by embracing and cultivating values that are now "battle hardened" against wool-gathering academics. I have had experience of such results in mainline Protestant churches that portrays the heroine negatively as one who compromised rather than risk, as did Daniel, a martyr's death. By allowing this understanding to surface, we engage in a fruitful discussion of various ways of dealing with deism and skepticism. I was able to mention the story of a Jewish women's author whose phoebe was appalled when her daughter was chosen to play Esther in a Purim Spiel: "I don't want her to be Esther — I want her to be Vahdit! Still, were there not values to be affirmed and dangers to be faced in both challenges? Students from societies in which they were part of religious or cultural minorities were able to weigh in with vivid experiences.

I also have found that students are more likely to share aspects of their earlier formation when I am vulnerable enough to show my own path with them at times. In beginning a segment on Daniel, I once took to class a worn book of dispensational charts that I had purchased as a boy with my paper route earnings. They would quickly see that I had other things to offer them, but meanwhile we had a productive time talking about the fascinations in some circles with apocalyptic literature, from Hal Lindsey to the Left Behind series, with some reminders of ancient antecedents in the history of the church. Once the problems were framed from this experience, and once we had an opportunity to explore not only what we registered but what might carry theological value in such popular expositions, it was natural to talk about form-critical definitions, comparisons with other literature, analyses of historical and social setting, and new theological assessments.

Communicating respect for the background of students is also a part of the management of learning from the diversity of our student populations. It is one thing to recruit and to celebrate diversity, developing the epidemiological structures to pose questions that we feel confident will give voice to neglected perspectives; but it is another thing to allow students to articulate their diversity on their own terms. Creating an atmosphere that encourages students to bring their background into the classroom creates not a few surprises. A discussion of call narratives, for instance, might bring from an international student an energetic defense of the need for an audible word from God, or an account of a dramatic healing or of struggles with spiritual warfare. If we do not begin by privileging western questions, but by inviting a respectful sharing of experience, we end up with a much messier but more invigorating, more truly dialogical discussion.

"Appreciative Inquiry"

In recent years, insights from a theory of organizational change called "appreciative inquiry" have been addressed with interesting results to assessments of both congregational life and theological education. Of the basic assumptions of this theory, two seem particularly relevant to our discussion. First, "[P]eople have more confidence in the journey to the future when they are forward parts of the past." When an organizational approaches change by talking about what is wrong, "participants express their fears in resistance." By contrast, "confidence and trust can be built when questions create direct links with the organization's best and most appreciated narratives." Second, "organizations are heliotropic"; that is, they lean toward the source of energy — whether that energy is healthy or not. If our approach to the communities that produce and employ our students is primarily one of diagnosis and prescription, we risk creating resistance or alienation. Perhaps, like our colleagues in medical education, we need to recognize more fully the value of promoting health as well as diagnosing illness. And we need not fear, I believe, a loss of critical acuity, as though we are accommodating popular preoccupations by making the lessons we have learned in our guilds. Instead, if we let students know we are in common cause with them, and that we are respectful of their journeys and of the commitments that have brought them to us, they will often be more severe in their critique of poor theology than we could be, and more creative in finding constructive and hopeful alternatives.

Cultural Diversity as a Theological Resource

Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, Claremont School of Theology

Creating space for affecting one another is also important. One student writes in his blog about another student:

She was different from me in many ways. She was theologically more conservative and far more religious. She was one of those people I have never met except at this school. Subsequently, she added me as one of her first year and perhaps my life. That is kind of the point. Claremont uniquely brings together those who we may or may not have met otherwise. We come together and discuss issues, topics, and ideas that are tough to face but could help transform the world. Each person different than myself has helped me transform.

Conflict is an inevitable part of becoming multicultural. We are speaking from and acting out of personal perspectives that do not match the perspectives of others. Exploration can be one way to channel the energy of conflict. Tell me more is a phrase we learn to use as we pause before exploding or coming to premature judgments. In my classes I construct rules for our dialogue that guide how we respond during conflict. Another source of our energy emerges when a person finds and uses his/her voice for the first time. This is a powerful and sometimes explosive experience. In order to allow for such healing while respecting others, we want to design the rules of dialogue such that they may accommodate confrontation with respect. This helps us to speak the truth in love. We can see ourselves as “transforming” persons from what they need to be confronted with.

Pedagogical Considerations

To begin the process of critical reflection, I use a social location exercise which explores gender, social orientation, class, networks, and political and religious stances. We look at how these things were taught, reinforced and enforced in our lives. “The Cycle of Socialization,” by Bobbie Harro in Readings for Diversity and Social Justice, helps us discuss what it would mean to change our socialization. This knowledge makes us aware of the personal projections we place upon texts and contexts. It teaches us to identify the image of others. It is in critical reflection where one begins the multicultural becoming.

Dealing with multiculturalism is not only about having students from different cultures in the classroom or the inclusion of peripheral materials outside of the accepted curricular canon. Multiculturalism develops through human interaction. In the book Becoming Multicultural, Terry Ford reminds us that it is a way of being, perceiving, thinking, and acting in the world. Becoming multicultural indicates changing from a dominant perspective which has been shaped by our socialization process to a view that includes multiple realities and perspectives. This suggests that we need a shift from learning that is conceived as transmitting knowledge, to learning that has as its goal the co-construction of knowledge. In knowledge construction, the learners are viewed as active participants in the creation of their own knowledge. Because learners interact with and interpret the world, knowledge is a function of the learner’s background and purposes.

This makes the learning process a transaction. It means that in classroom dynamics we will engage the historical, social, and cultural backgrounds that learners bring with them since these factors influence how learners think and the content of the material. In a transactional teaching/learning context, teachers must recognize that we bring to the learning context our own values, meanings, and interpretations which our histories, cultures, and communities have helped to construct. This is the stuff of which becoming multicultural is made. To be multicultural, a person must become aware of their social location and the life experiences that have shaped that positionality. This requires much reflection. The goal of multiculturalism is to become more conscious of ourselves and the process by which that consciousness is brought about and shapes how we and others operate in the world. It includes becoming aware of how and to what degree we have been made in the image of others. It is in critical reflection of one’s experiences, and the meanings and origins of the past interpretations of these, where one begins the multicultural becoming.

N A CLASS on religious education at Claremont we were discussing a paradigm that facilitated teaching persons in congregations how to become involved in social justice. The paradigm invites us to look at the brokenness in the world. The conversation had gathered the different passions of students and inevitably one issue clashed with another until a very heated discussion around issues of racism was ignited. Questions turned into accusations and stereotypic remarks, which angered even the quiet students into explosive speech.

What should I do? I could become appre- hensive and cut off the discussion as inappropri- ate. I could intervene, name what was taking place in the discussion, and suggest ways to foster fuller listening. I could overpower the other voices with my authority as profes- sor by offering theoretical expertise and shut- ting out the emotions as if these had no knowledge to offer. What was my role as professor? How did my personal experience with conflict and racism shape my inner con- versant action?

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He is able to trace his journey from this beginning to the recognition of the role that fear and political interests plays in the socialization of these prejudices (decon- struction). He began reconstruction by deep inquiry into both the religious traditions, reading and comparing the histor- ies and sacred writings. He continued by engaging Muslims in prayer and dialogue. His journal entry reads:

To realize the presence of God/Allah in the tradition of the Muslim allows me to fully participate in their practice of prayer and in dialogue. I can dialogue because I understand that I am listening to a servant of God and not to a devil.... Education leads us to find common places. Now we can begin to talk about how to solve our common problems in the community.

The student has integrated past personal experience, course content and inquiry, and the skills of interfaith dialogue. He has come to understand that there is a journey from violent prejudice to communal coop- eration, and he seeks to integrate and apply the elements necessary for constructing such a journey in a particular ministerial context. The journal becomes a place for integration — it allows him to trace his own journey of theological metanoia. He can identify his theological framework and the ways that it justifies and cements the elements of his group’s identity into a cohe- sive, meaningful, and tangible world order.

He can then create a strategy for bringing others on a similar journey of reconstruc- tion that is sensitive to how the religious functions to mediate the absolute.

Conclusion

Multicultural engagement as a theological resource calls for a transformative process for teachers and students. It calls for connected knowledge where a teacher engages in authentic conversations with her stu- dents with the possibility of constructing shared perspectives. Such teaching is where the content of our disciplines intersects with the different perspectives garnered from our experiences and the issues and problems of our communities. It is forming students who can reinvest religious tradi- tions with new meanings from which they construct ministerial strategies in response to changing circumstances in shifting con- texts. This is the beginnings of what Craig Dyrskta refers to as prophetic and pastoral imagination in Initiatives in Religion.

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Coaching Theological Imagination

Serene Jones, Yale Divinity School

THIS PAST FALL I returned to the classroom after a year off, feeling rested and more ready to teach than I had since I started 14 years ago. The time away had given me distance on my work and renewed my sense of the wonderfully complex character of theological education.

According to our mission statement, my task at Yale is to help the school foster “the knowledge and love of God through critical engagement with the traditions of the Christian churches in the context of the contemporary world.” What a rich vocation — teaching students the blended arts of knowing and loving, critiquing and traditioning, teaching students the blended arts of knowing and loving, critiquing and traditioning, teaching students the blended arts of knowing and loving, critiquing and traditioning. And how might Christian habits of thought play a role in that conjuring? I then give them an example of how it might happen by letting them in on my own theological stream of consciousness:

Apple? Eve’s apple. An apple computer. Technology as temptation. Technology as gendered. Does the Internet represent our understanding of divine Providence? Our social responsibility? Are these different for people who don’t have access to the Internet? For people who have at their fingertips an ever-expanding range of knowledge? It’s ambiguous, isn’t it? . . .

Apple as gift. Sin and pleasure. Or basic sustenance? How does technology shape our relation to knowledge? It’s ambiguous, isn’t it? . . .

“Teaching them these — the basic rules of Christian thought — is our most demanding task because it requires showing them that these rules are both firm and flexible, both sturdy and open.”

Our Systematics syllabus is designed to do this — to combine showing and doing. Over the course of two semesters, students read a lot of Karl Barth and Karl Rahner, two great masters of theological imagining. Our hope is that by repeatedly following their plays of mind, students will begin to learn (and be enabled to practice) the deep logic that drives their projects. We also read contemporary theologians — feminists, womenists, liberation theologians, communars, process thinkers, postmodernists, etc. — to learn new gestures practiced in the church today, some of them arful, improvised, and grace, others not.

In my bivocacy lectures, I also try to show them how to practice theological gestures. Here, they see me do it on my feet and in conversation with the world around me — with texts, traditions, my own life, politics, church culture, and, perhaps most importantly, their own pressing questions. I’ve never quite mastered the complex case study method used by my colleagues in the social scientific fields, but for me, it would be impossible to lecture without multiple “examples” of the doctrinal moves I’m exploring. Whether I’m describing justification by faith by showing them how it pertains to their anxieties about an upcoming exam, or exploring creation by reminding them how odd it is to think of the air they breathe as a divine gift, I’m trying to show them that it’s in these accounts of lived experience that the gestural logic of our faith resides.

I also try to show them that doctrines shape more than our understanding of God — they are the eschatological implications of that. I then give them an example of how it might happen by letting them in on my own theological stream of consciousness:

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Community Practices of Integration

Michael Battle, Virginia Theological Seminary

In this essay I will attempt to do a strange thing: to begin practically and end theoretically. What I mean by practical is to sketch a description of our common seminary life. And what I mean by theoretical is to argue for why our common life cannot be separated from our academic life. So, I begin with the practical. The purpose of our common life at Virginia Theological Seminary is to increase our attention span for God and neighbor. One of my favorite Christian mystics, Simone Weil teaches community consists of attention. She believes that prayer is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable toward God. The quality of the attention counts for much in the quality of the prayer, but she cautions that this quality does not mature without a joy for learning. Without a desire and joy for learning, we cannot give our whole attention to God. Our intentional use of the common life through worship, classrooms, shared meals, and small groups always seeks how community practices of nonviolence are often neglected, and makes explicit connections between Mahatma Gandhi and Christian spirituality.

Worship, I argue, is another way of knowing communally. Without communal epistemology, we seem to be in a perpetual search for God at our own convenience, and often made in our own individual images.

The joy of learning that comes from our various communal practices helps us synthesize a theology: we can only seek God if we already know God. We break this circular argument by depending upon others to know God and ourselves. After all, this is theological formation — that we are formed for communal living. To live in community, however, is not an easy endeavor. Such life requires change, transformation, and creativity — three forces that must be held together intentionally. For example, as part of our broader review of worship life at the seminary, one day I addressed the role of living outside of our comfort zone for both our leadership and personal roles in worship. Such openness would be needed to make sense of different communities who also depend on us to cultivate their joy of learning about God and our neighbors.

Michael Battle is Vice President and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at Virginia Theological Seminary (Episcopal). Michael lived in residence with Archbishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa for two years, 1993–1994, and was ordained a priest in South Africa by Desmond Tutu in 1993. He has written out of his studies and friendship with Desmond Tutu, including such books as Reconciling Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu and The Wisdom of Desmond Tutu. He is also the author of Blessed Are the Peacemakers: A Christian Spiritualitv of Nonviolence; this book wrestles with how Christian practices of nonviolence are often neglected, and makes explicit connections between Mahatma Gandhi and Christian spirituality.

Shaping Vocational Identity in Field Education

Lynn Rhodes, Pacific School of Religion

We are trying to move from student-centered education to education for communal accountability and faithful witness in the world.

This makes it very difficult to define or shape pastoral/vocational identity for specific roles or leadership functions. We try to develop education that encourages people to reflect critically upon contexts and their own self-understanding. The development of discourse and discernment issues of ministry within communities of accountability. We try to counter the "lone ranger" model of ministry while committed to prophetic work. In our understanding of "communities of accountability" we include local faith communities within the larger context of our accountability to our earth and sustainability, to all marginalized communities, and to those labeled the "least" in our country and the world.

Teaching Practices/Strategies for Practical Theology and Field Education

As field education faculty, I have co-taught the "Frameworks for Critical Engagement in Ministry" for the past two years. The purpose of this course is to introduce the students to theories of reflective practice by engaging them in contexts and tasks that address issues of suffering and hope. This course is taught in the first year as an introduction to the methods of critical theological reflection that inform preaching, worship, education, pastoral care, community leadership, arts, and spiritual formation. Our facility present their praxis models of teaching in teams. For example, the faculty in worship and in sociology of religion gave a joint presentation on lament. They presented a psalm and hip hop. The psalm was presented as voiced by a woman who was raped by a friend and the hip hop was presented by young street artists. The discussion was on ritual practices of lament and theologies of crisis. The whole group then engaged in a discussion about how to support women who are raped. The whole group decides which questions to include in the discussion. It is a concrete way to emphasize that theological insight is never complete and that people with very different theological positions can work together.

The final paper for field education is their theology of ministry. In this paper they integrate their personal experiences into their understanding of their practice of ministry. The paper is written in draft form for group discussion. After the discussion of the paper, the student and the professor decide how the group is going to respond to the group. If a student presented a "draft" paper, she/he is much more willing to work with it in discussion. It is a concrete way to emphasize that theological insight is never complete and that people with very different theological positions can work together.

Another critical aspect of field education is the teaching/learning with field mentors. We meet with them six times a year. This is critical for the integration between field and seminary classes. We engage in formative relationships through dialogues, other faculty presentations, and mentors' wisdom.

How do we recognize integration when we see it? The immediate feedback for integration comes from the group discussion. If a student that the student, the field mentor, and the teaching parish or teaching agency provide. This is critical for the integration between field and seminary classes. We engage in formative relationships through dialogues, other faculty presentations, and mentors' wisdom.

We understand integration begins when seminarians make connections between their work and the work of their faith communities; when they see complexity and different perspectives with real openness; when they are taught by them to see their communities in greater complexity; when they can hold ambiguity and passionate commitment together; when they gain courage to face destroyed lives and communities and find connections to others and God that sustain them in their work; when they have self-knowledge that is transparent to others; and when they can articulate for others a theological understanding and a practice that shapes their vision and is still open to further insight and discernment.

We hold ourselves accountable for educating for ministries of justice and compassion. We are far from having an integrated approach, but we are learning it through team teaching and through accountability to our common principles of education. Integration is a very fragile thing. Often we are in the midst of chaos and diversity and challenge that reminds us daily that we are really living in ambiguity and great diversity of experience. We are committed to the well-being of each other, our communities, and the whole of creation. Our school is struggling to understand what it means to live less fearfully in such a time as this, with more courage, less arrogance, and more passion, and with intentional critical reflection upon the faith and diversity of knowledge, experience, and historical resources.
Spiritual Formation as Integrative Practice

Elizabeth Liebert, SNJM, San Francisco Theological Seminary

MONG THE WAYS that integra-
tion occurs in the seminars, espe-
cially in the person preparing for
ministry, spiritual formation holds a signifi-
cant (though not exclusive) place. Seminary
students engaged in intentional spiritual
formation regularly report that they make
significant breakthroughs about their own
strengths and their emerging vocational
direction through formation practices. At
moments of struggle, they are grateful for a
“holding environment” that allows them to
struggle without imposing predetermined
outcomes or time frames. They can contin-
ue the struggle as long as necessary, trusting
that their searching and wrestling are held
confidently and prayerfully in the hearts
of their colleagues, and co-travelers engaged
in their own searches and struggles.

Spiritual formation can be defined in various
ways. In its widest sense, spiritual formation
means attending to the Holy’s manifestation,
discerning the authenticity of this manifesta-
tion from other “voices,” and responding through
appropriate actions and practices. In attending,
we learn to look in expected and unexpected
places for the traces of the Holy: in oneself, in
relationships, in communities of many sorts,
in systems and structures that organize society,
and in the natural world itself. In discerning,
we sensitively ourselves to listen — to ourselves,
to others, to cultures, circumstances, nature,
as well as to sacred texts and liturgical practices
of our various traditions — and to discern the
ways how God might be present and active.
In responding, we come alongside God in God’s
living, personal discernment, and discern-
ment into the life of particular faith commu-
nities. But the community that ignores, aban-
ons, or significantly restricts spiritual formation
soon finds itself stagnant, even dying.

For better or for worse, spiritual communities
have agendas that they carry out through spiritu-
al formation. At its best, formation is more
than assimilation into the status quo. It is, as
Davina Lopez notes, “the process of critically
creating and re-creating ourselves in relation to
a larger whole, all the while engaging questions
of who we need/want to be and what kind of
world we envision.”1 One of the tasks of a sem-
inary-based spiritual formation program must
be to teach the critical skills for evaluating the
spiritual formation that is explicitly encour-
aged, that which “just happens” without much
attention, and even that which is taught by its
members.

At the level of the institutions that prepare
leaders for faith communities, I believe spiri-
tual formation must contain two foci: 1) the
spiritual formation of the emerging leader,
both in the present and for their future as reli-
gious leaders; and 2) their ability, upon their
departure, to offer spiritual formation in their
future places of ministry. They will be the cata-
lysts of the spiritual formation in their own set-
tings, the one who set the example, invite,
supervise, evaluate, and integrate spiritual for-
mation into the life of particular faith commu-
nities. But they must also themselves be per-
sons of vibrant faith in order to carry out their
spiritual leadership over time. When the spiri-
tual leaders of the ministerial education
sometimes at the encouragement of the busy
congregation — clergy more readily crash and
burn, causing damage to ripple throughout
the churches. I am convinced that engag-
ing clergy spiritual formation is one of the
most effective prevention programs available to
communities of faith.

Spiritual Formation in Seminary Life

Spiritual formation, then, whatever its set-
ting and theological grounding, participates in
three primary dynamics, attending, discer-
ning, and responding, with the goal of helping
one become a more integrated per-
son of faith. Any one or combination of
dynamics can provide moments where integra-
tion occurs. Let me illustrate these
dynamics with what we do at San Francisco
Theological Seminary, a seminary of the
Presbyterian Church (USA). At SFTS,
spiritual formation finds its formal and
required curricular expression in the field-
education and the integrative study curricu-
um, a new configuration of which we are
currently implementing. Three continuous
ties of vocational discernment, personal
spiritual formation, and contextual analysis
weave themselves through the integrative
studies classes and internship. We believe
that these three threads are intrinsically inter-
related, because who we are and will become
is situated in a particular tradition and must
be lived out in the service to particular faith
communities. At various moments in the
integrative studies curriculum we introduce
and then circle back again to such questions
as: “Who are you? How have you become who
you are? What kind of person do you want to
be? What kind of leadership do you want to
even want to do What Rule of Life will sup-
port that goal?”

These integrative threads are set in dialogue
with the critical theological and biblical for-
mation on offer in their respective parts of
the curriculum, providing, we intend, three
legs that contribute to the overall spiritual
formation of clergy. Our desired outcome of
“whole leaders for the whole church”
requires the entire seminary curriculum for
its realization. We seek to prepare future
leaders of faith communities who not only
understand but have internalized the
Christian biblical tradition (historical studies),
recognize the varieties of ways Reformed
and other Christians have lived out their Christian
life with others (history of Christian thought
and practices, world Christianity, interfaith
dialogue), can speak critically and responsi-
bly about their tradition (theology and
ethics), and have the skills and arts of min-
istry (practical theology, pastoral and personal
administration, Christian education). This
formal curriculum is surrounded by a
vibrant chaplain program, with four regular
worship services each week. The chaplain
and chaplain’s assistants, who are students,
not only oversee the preparation of these ser-
dices, but also attend to the spiritual care of
the seminary community. A counseling cen-
ter, which offers spiritual direction as well as
several counseling modalities, is available to

faculty, staff, students and their families, and
to the larger community. In a very real sense,
spiritual formation is the task of all the disci-
plines and all the professors, and, indeed, a
goal of the entire life of the community.

In addition, San Francisco Theological
Seminary also has a long-established
Program in Christian Spirituality invested
with the task of extending and deepening
the spiritual formation offered in the cur-
iculum, as well as providing specialized
preparation for leadership in spiritual forma-
tion that the students will employ in their
future pastoral roles. In a rotation of five
one-credit elective courses, we invite stu-
dents to deepen their practices of biblical
prayer, centering prayer, contemplative lis-
tening, personal discernment, and discern-
ment into the life of particular faith
communities in their own searches and
struggles. We encourage them to connect
their spirituality to the wider world. We invit-
e them to pay attention to their serv-
ces and to discern and to see how they
are connected to their spirituality, and we
encourage them to connect their spirituality
to the whole leaders for the whole church
in the ministry of spiritual direction that
students can begin during their MDiv
studies. We encourage other faculty and staff
to mentor individual students or small
groups beyond what the staff of the program
can ourselves do, and to support students in
setting up their own formation groups. In
short, recognizing that spiritual formation
can take place at various nodes in the insti-
tution, we provide what we hope is a bal-
ance of formal courses and less formal spiri-
tual formation offerings so that students can
find that which most helps them at various
moments of their seminary journey.

A student recently told me, at the end of
one of our one-credit formation classes, “I
struggled with the practice all semester, and
I am clearer than ever, that this practice,
however valid for some persons, is not one
that nourishes my spirituality. But I’m glad I
stayed with it because I see how it
is. I feel I could with integrity introduce it
to a congregation.” I want to say, in return,
“Great! You’ve learned some very important
things about your religious tradition, differ-
ces in prayer, and the possibility of God’s
prayer will not fit all others in your congre-
gation; and God is faithful beyond any par-
ticular practice.” Not bad for a couple hours
a week for a semester.

Davina Lopez, Davina C. “Marking Time,
Shaping the Future.” Religious Studies News
24, no.12 (October 2006): 12.

SPOTLIGHT ON THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Elizabeth Liebert is Professor of Spiritual
Life at San Francisco Theological Seminary
and a member of the Christian Spirituality
doctoral faculty at the Graduate Theological
Union. Her teaching regularly includes spiri-
tual formation classes for persons preparing
for ministry in Christian settings. She fre-
quently writes on spiritual practices and
their transforming potential for ordinary
persons. Her next book will focus on using
discernment in decision-making.

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tion, discerning the authenticity of this manifesta-
tion from other “voices,” and responding through
appropriate actions and practices.

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Integration across the Curriculum

Diane Hymans, Trinity Lutheran Seminary

In a recent New Testament II class at Trinity Lutheran Seminary, the subject for the day was Paul's emphasis on giving oneself for others, looking particularly at the Christ hymn in Philippians 2:6-11, as well as related passages, including Paul's reference to himself as an example (Phil. 2:20-21). One insightful student commented, "Paul isn't a very good example of self-care, is he?" The student was bringing content from her first-year "Person in Ministry" course into this second-year New Testament class. Professor Clayton Cox, who teaches the course, reports that the student's comment led to a fruitful conversation about the differences between a modern parish pastor and the first-century Paul. "Self-care is sometimes dangerous, ministry took during the Roman empire," Cox reports. "We considered that self-care and giving oneself for the gospel are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and that proper self-care enables one's ministry to be stronger and longer-lasting." The discussion also led to the observation that some persons, even now, may be called to more perilous ministry than others.

This incident is an example of one form that integration across the curriculum takes at Trinity Lutheran Seminary. It is not uncommon for content from one course to find its way into the discussion in a course in another discipline. The faculty hopes that this will happen, and, in fact, encourages it. Since the 1980s, when the faculty realized that pre-seminary theological training could no longer be assumed, integration has been one of the core values underlying the curriculum at Trinity.

The MDiv curriculum at Trinity Seminary is more structured than in many theological schools, with a significant number of required courses taken in prescribed sequence. It is built around the classical theological curriculum — biblical studies, historical and systematic theology, and practical theology. In addition to a sequence of required courses in these foundational disciplines, students are expected to take a variety of courses designated as options in specific areas, including the arts, missiology, preaching, and several Bible options. In what room they have left in their schedules, students may choose elective courses. The core courses serve as prerequisites for almost everything that follows. The essentials of this curriculum have been in place since the early 1990s, though many aspects have evolved since then.

The curriculum is front-loaded with the basics. Entering juniors take courses in Bible, systematic theology, church history, and worship. All are intended to provide a base from which to move into the mid-year and senior-year courses in pastoral care and counseling and Christian education. ELCA students also take a course called "Lutheran Identity," organized around the Lutheran confessions, while students from other traditions take a course related to their own background. The intent is that the content from the first-year foundational disciplines will find its way into these second-year courses on the practice of ministry. The courses related to denominational identity are designed to move beyond simply naming the content of the traditions to exploring how they shape the witness and ministry of the church in distinctive ways.

Integrative Sites in the Curriculum

There are some required courses in the curriculum that are intentionally designed to nurture the practice of integration from the beginning of students' work in seminary. First-year students are involved in two of these integrative courses. The first is "Person in Ministry," which brings the resources of pastoral psychology into conversation with those of the Bible and theology to help students understand themselves and the ways in which they relate to others in light of their emerging pastoral identity. The second is "Faith Seeking Understanding," which is designed as an introduction to the entire theological education enterprise. Nearly everyone on the faculty puts in a guest appearance at some point. The course is "not Theory 101," because it introduces students to substantive issues in theology and ministry from three points of view — content, context, and method — and it integrates the concept of integration. As faculty members model practices of integration, first-year students can ask questions about the relationship between faith and intellect.

Concurrently, contextual experiences are an important component of Trinity's curriculum. Students in the MDiv program are required to participate in a Ministry in Context assignment, CPE, and internship. Ministry in Context (MIC) begins in the junior year. After the Christmas break, students are assigned to an MIC site, usually a congregation. For this first year, students are primarily involved in observing the life of the congregation and assisting in worship. During their mid-year, students are exposed to a wider range of activities and take a more active leadership role. In many instances, the sequence of involvement in specific aspects of ministry is related to the sequence of required courses that they are taking. For example, one assignment in the required course in educational ministry asks mediators to teach in an educational setting at their MIC site. They are to design a series of three lesson plans, teach the sessions, and write a reflection paper afterwards. The teaching experiences that students are having in their MIC setting become part of the classroom conversation that explores the teaching-learning process. In turn, the content of many students' teaching designs comes from what they are studying in other courses at the seminary.

The first two years of the curriculum are intentionally moving toward the primary contextual experience for students at Trinity — the third-year, full-time internship in a parish.

The first two years of the curriculum are intentionally moving toward the primary contextual experience for students at Trinity — the third-year, full-time internship in a parish. This is required by the ELCA for all candidates for ordination. Internship helps shape the pastoral identity of Trinity students in powerful ways. They are exposed to the full range of ministerial responsibilities, which test the knowledge and skills learned in their first two years of classroom work. Supervising pastors receive training from the seminary to help students reflect on their experience and integrate course work with the reality of life in the congregation.

When students return for their final year of seminary study, they are different. The senior-year curriculum builds on previous coursework and the internship experience to bring it all together for students as they prepare to move into their first call in a parish. Two major integrative courses carry much of that load. "Pastoral Leadership in Ministry and Mission" spans two terms and focuses on the role of pastor as leader. Drawing heavily on case study methodology, students reflect on their experience as interns and work to integrate theological understanding with the experience of ministry and mission in the church. In their final term, students also participate in a course in "Constructive Theology." Here a primary question is "How does theology matter in the decisions we make in ministry?" The course seeks to help the student build a theology to carry into the parish. The internship experience is a continuing conversational partner in exploring the issues involved.

One more aspect of life at Trinity seeks to foster integration for students. Every student is assigned to an I-group. More formally called Integrative Groups, because they are encouraged but not required, their weekly gatherings are an aspect of the informal curriculum at Trinity. Each group consists of students from every degree program and from each year of study, along with a faculty advisor. While there is some structure to the group experience, each I-group takes on its own character. For instance, each group is responsible for planning one week of chapel worship each year. And second-year students are required to bring a critical incident from their internship experience to the group for processing. But the mix of students fosters a great deal of sharing from the whole of the seminary experience, including what happens in intracurricular experiences, and the personal lives of students.

For Trinity's faculty, integration does not just happen. It is built into the structure of the curriculum in the way courses are sequenced, and in the relationship between courses and contextual experiences. It emerges in the way individual faculty members design their courses, in class discussions, and in specific assignments. When the current curriculum was put into place, faculty met in interdivi- sional groups to talk about integration. Those teaching the junior-year courses, for example, met to compare notes on such matters as content and assigned readings. Though this practice no longer happens in a formal way, it is still a part of the informal conversation among faculty members.

The challenge will come in the next academic year. In fall 2007, Trinity will move from a quarter to a semester calendar. We have just completed an extensive revision of our curriculum to fit this new reality. We are retaining many of the elements of the current curriculum, such as the junior- and senior-year integrative courses, and all of our programs and requirements. Sequencing becomes more difficult when students can take fewer courses in a year, but we are committed to working at it. The faculty members who will teach the senior-year integrative sequence, which will now consist of a course titled "Pastor as Leader," followed by a course called "Pastor as Theologian," are already making plans to show how the two can flow into each other. And our academic dean has indicated his intention to gather small groups of faculty as we move into the year to talk about the needs of our students, both in the particular year of study and throughout the sequence of the curriculum.

Does it work? For the most part — yes. Faculty members often hear students relating learning experiences and other opportunities. It’s not uncommon to hear students say, "It’s all starting to fit together." And that applies to students in every year of study. Not all of our requirements are on paper. But, after many years of working with it, integration is becoming second nature to Trinity's faculty.
AmeriCAn BaptiSt SeminAry of the West is a small, predomi-
nantly African-American seminary located in Berkeley, Cali-
fornia. We are a founding member of the Gradu-ate Theological Union, a nine-member consorti-um of seminaries which provides a com-mon library, cross registration, and MA and PhD programs. We have been transitioning for over a decade from being a historically white seminary to a primarily African-
American school, while at the same time experiencing significant changes within our denomina-
tional life. As many of our denominational leaders and pastors turned increasingly to the right on social, political, and theological issues, ABSW sought to occupy the progressive middle. As a result, we have lost both financial and moral sup-
port from many leaders and churches.

As the school was experiencing all these changes, it was important to clearly state the mission that would form our future. After much conversation at all levels of the school’s life, a mission statement was crafted:

ABSW is a Christ-centered school that trains men and women for leadership in the church of the twenty-first century who are:
• Prepared to minister in a multicultural and multiracial world
• Rooted in an evangelical heritage and tradi-
tion
• Equipped for ecumenical partnership in ministry
• Informed theologically and biblically
• Skilled in the practice of ministry for per-
sonal, ecclesial, and social transformation
• Committed to the justice demands of the Gospel.

How are we to fulfill this mission in a time with fewer resources and changing denomini-
tional patterns? For over two years the faculty of ABSW, aided by a grant from the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning, worked on developing a curriculum that would accomplish our stated mission.

Reinventing Our Curriculum

One thing that was clear to our faculty was that we could not conduct business as usual. The traditional theological education peda-
gogy which placed more emphasis on knowl-
edge than skill development simply was not equiva-
 lent to men and women for leadership in the church.

When we had been relying on a “banking-
theory” of education where the emphasis had been on “opening accounts” for students in various fields — New Testament, Old Testament, theology, history, pastoral care, etc., and then you would fill each account with basic information. A successful student would leave seminary with his/her account full of vital and interesting information. The focus of this method was more on content than application and more on the mastery of material than on acquiring critical learning skills.

This “top down” understanding of teaching/learning, which posted certain materials and areas of concentration as true, or at least valuable, did not necessarily take seriously the context or contexts in which both students and faculty were learning. It is as if there was universal truth/knowledge that needed to be learned in order to be theologi-
cally educated without much consideration of relevance or application in the context of ministry. Everybody assumed that “practical theology” was a lesser discipline that was sec-
tary to the disciplines of Bible, theology, and history. Nor was there any consideration given to the question of how contexts might change the nature of both what is taught and how it is understood. For instance, does the Pauline language about obedience sound dif-
ferent in an African-American context than its does in a majority white context? Does language about obedience have different meanings to women than to men? Is the Pauline context important in grasping how texts from the first century are carried over into the twenty-first century?

Our faculty came to the conclusion that we needed to abandon the “top down” under-
standing of teaching/learning and replace it with a theory of learning that included a focus on context. We needed to start from the bottom up. When we looked at the base line of our mission statement, we kept running into the issue of contextuality. We could not prepare men and women for multicultural and multiracial ministry without a focus on context. Our evangelical heritage and tradi-
tion is a context from which we operate. Ecumenical partnership is also contextual. Even biblical and theological formation is a process which must be accomplished in the context of time and space. Clearly, developing skills in the practice of ministry for personal, ecclesial, and social transformation hinges on understanding, exegeting, and reading multi-
ple contexts of culture and ministry.

Slowly but surely, a conversion began to occur in the imagination of our faculty about the importance of context in the reinvention of our curriculum in order to meet the goals of our mission statement. A consensus formed around this basic insight: Whatever we do in developing our curriculum, it must be radically contextual.

A second insight developed in relationship to the first. When you take context serious-
lly, you have to take multiple angles of anal-
ysis using several disciplines to gain knowl-
edge and perspective. Radical contextuality re-
quires interdisciplinary. For instance, to understand the context of min-
istry in an African-American Baptist church in East Oakland, you have to understand African-American history, ecclesiology, and urban ministry, just to name a few of the relevant disciplines. The minister or faith community must learn to do this multilevel analysis in order for ministry to be defined and implemented. The question arose as to whether we as a faculty could learn to teach in a multidisciplinary manner and still be a member in good standing in one’s guild? Would our commitments to the disci-
plinary thinking of the academy impede our openness to this new pedagogy? This may be the most difficult of the tensions that we continue to deal with.

Designing a New Model

Out of our two insights on contextuality and interdisciplinarity, the following pic-
ture of a new curriculum emerged. We cre-
ated two-year-long interdisciplinary collo-
quias that each had a contextual base. Each of these required colloquia was 12 units and involved a team of faculty engaged in the teaching. Context was the element which served to integrate the two-year sequence. The design was as follows:

Year 1 – Junior Colloquium

Team taught by the ABSW faculty, the aim of Junior Colloquium is for students to develop basic understandings and practices in the areas of theology, Old Testament, and the history of Christianity while engaging in congregational studies. Visits to ministry contexts are part and parcel of the study of theology, OT, and church history. The theo-
retical work is always done in relationship to the contexts of ministry. Context visits are led by pastors and church staff.

Year 2 – Middler Colloquium

This required second-year MDiv colloqui-
uum comprises six credits of academic work per semester integrated with placement in a ministry setting for the academic year. The colloquium meets twice a week and also assumes that each student will work 10–12 hours a week in a teaching congregation. During the first semester, the two major subjects integrated into the practice of min-
istry are ecclesiology and the Gospels with emphasis on the pastoral arts of preaching and worship. In the second semester the study of ecclesiology considers the contem-
porary church in light of the New Testament Pauline Letters and communi-
ties. This study is integrated with the pastoral arts of worship, pastoral care, and congregational programming. We relate to baptism, the Lord’s Supper, weddings, and funerals. Pastors are trained to be teaching pastors and join the faculty in teaching and supervising students in their ministry sites. Pastoral evaluations are part of the assessment process used to judge student progress.

A third-year-long sequence was created to further enhance student integration of learning. The Senior Mentor Project semi-
nar is designed to give each MDiv student the opportunity to choose an area or issue in ministry for exploration and study. A person who is an authority in that area of ministry is to be appointed by ABSW to serve as a mentor to the student. Under the mentor’s guidance, along with ABSW fac-
sulty, students gain expertise in a particular area of ministry that concludes in develop-
ing, executing, and evaluating a ministry project.

Measuring Our Progress

This third-year-long sequence has provided us with the opportunity to evaluate how we are doing in helping students to develop skills in both evaluating contexts and think-

From the Bottom Up: The Role of Contextualization in Theological Education

Keith A. Russell, American Baptist Seminary of the West

Keith A. Russell is President and Professor of Pastoral Theology at American Baptist Seminary of the West in Berkeley, California. Russell has been engaged in contextual theo-
logical education since 1976, first at New York Theological Seminary and for the last decade at ABSW. He also serves as Editor-in-Chief of the Living Pulpit, a quarterly journal on preaching.
Theological Education in the New Global Reality

Dwight N. Hopkins, University of Chicago Divinity School

From June 2005 to July 2006, I taught a deeper global understanding of theological challenges for the start of this millennium. Consequently, I visited England, Australia, India, Japan, Fiji, Hawaii, Cuba, Jamaica, Brazil, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Botswana, South Africa, and various locations within the United States. Exciting challenges for theological education at the beginning of the twenty-first century consist of at least two important concerns. One deals with the increasing reality of the world context of all that we think, believe, and do. Some call this question of globalization, internationalized multiculturalism, religious pluralism, post-colonialism, or the radical shift to a single, imperial superpower. In this macro context, the second issue confronts the interplay between particularity and universality. How does theological education respect the particularity of various expressions of faiths and spiritualities while, at the same time, discern how particularity adds to the universal conversation among multiple communities of faiths and spiritualities? In short, can there be a healthy relationship between the local and the international, or the particular and the universal? This question has implications for the nature of theological education today. I argue that some of these implications can be grasped by facilitating a dialogue between the “First World” United States and the Third World (or so-called developing nations).

Gospel and Empire

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, and the subsequent decentralization of the U.S.S.R., the global scene has shifted radically. For the first time, the U.S. government became the sole, undisputed global giant. Prior to 1989, military language contained such phrases as “balance of power,” “shapers of influence,” and the protection of smaller “client states.” Since 1989, the language of the world context — the sole military, political, and monopoly capitalist superpower — has shifted to “we’re number one.” “We won the Cold War,” “we have a moral obligation to help the God-given responsibility of ruling the world.” In fact, this major shift in language has concrete implications in the real material world. The sole superpower is building an empire.

And a new form of religion, spurred on by institutions in the United States, has aggressively targeted the world for dominance. We might call this a third wave of Christian missions. The first wave was the so-called mission churches and church outreach — Episcopalian, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, African Methodist, etc. The second was the classic pentecostal churches — that is, Church of God in Christ and the Assemblies of God. The new third wave existed before the fall of the Berlin Wall, but it has taken off exponentially since the establishment of one superpower. In fact, its global missionary activities are supported by the U.S. government.

The third and new form of Christian missionaries, arguably the religious arm of the U.S. empire, is called neocharismatic Christianity. It emphasizes a wealth and health prosperity gospel, or the name-it-and-claim-it good news. If a poor person wants to be rich or have expensive things, he or she simply has to name what they want and claim it in the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ wants poor Christians to have a Mercedes Benz because material things show forth the power and blessings of salvation. In addition to wealth advocacy among the individual poor, neocharismatic Christianity performs spiritual healing and deliverance concerts by the laying on of hands to cast out demons from inside the individual bodies of poor people. What neocharismatic Christian missionaries do is mimic some of the same values of the U.S. empire, is called neocharismatic Christianity. It develops ongoing ties with the majority of the Third World, the First World United States have a lot to contribute. Theological scholars in the United States have a long tradition and highly sophisticated investigation of God-talk and international neocharismatic Christianity. And so when the First World participates in dialogue with the Third World, the First World interlocutors bring their full selves to the table.

Still, our educational processes are so much more enriched by participating in the multiple ways that theological studies unfold in the disparate communities throughout the world, especially the Third World. Such a dynamic interaction pushes U.S. intellectuals 1) to clarify taken-for-granted theological definitions; 2) to question their usual audiences; 3) to surface the unspoken American presuppositions; 4) to hear and experience new ways of doing theological education; 5) to realize that theological studies must connect with the diverse faiths and spiritual traditions in a changing cultural context; and 6) to really perceive how all of our theological teaching and writing are subjective statements that achieve their universal significance when put to the test of non-Americans throughout the world.

Theological education at the dawn of the twenty-first century has to take seriously the realities of the peoples who occupy the majority of the world. Millions of these peoples, but not the majority, are Christians. Inevitably, as theologians engage world Christianity, we will enter pedagogical and epistemological encounters with peoples of other faiths and spiritualities. So one of the first lessons we might learn is that global Christian partnerships as well as global, non-religious connections must move away from a posture of simply converting people to one’s faith or a narrow interpretation of a common faith. No, we need an orientation where we First World North Americans participate as equals with the rest of the global family. This in itself would be a radical shift because inherent to American culture is an unexamined arrogance that the United States is the best country in the world. This orientation too often permeates the church and its educators’ approach in conversations with the Third World.

Second, theological education needs to account for interdisciplinary methodol- ogy. For the majority of the Third World, religious educators begin with a social analysis of their families, communities, countries, and regions of the world. They do not start with an idea removed from the prior reality of their social locations. Because all theologians emerge from the particular social situation of the theologian advancing the theological education, one needs a host of nontheological disciplines to help unravel how religion operates in a complex, particular, and messy environment. Political economy as well as psychology can aid the theological field.

Third, theological education has to become more a public enterprise. Unfortunately in the U.S. tradition, theological education stresses an individual journey or something that is mainly, if not only, accountable to a small group of 10,000 scholars. I do agree that this is one vital public. But there are other publics calling for accountability. If theological education is about the relation between ‘theos’ and ‘logos,’ then ‘theos’ and ‘logos’ inhabit all of creation. There are additional publics calling for accountability in theological education, like the church and the wider civic society. And, because the United States is the sole imperialist superpower in the world, there is the public of the Third World.

Fourth, as we seek to have critical and self-critical conversation with the public of the Third World, it is important to devise ways of forging ongoing, structured, and accountable ties with these regions. Although we in the United States are in an environment that fosters the belief that theology comes out of Europe and North America, if we reorient ourselves, we will discover the vast numbers of theological scholars in the developing world. We will also encounter the intellectual quality of their written production in the academic study of religions. One of the main reasons U.S. and European theology dominate the world is because many local publishers in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, and the Pacific Islands are being blocked from global distribution.

Fifth, the biblical example of Jesus shows an individual who traveled the highways and byways affirming, critiquing, and relating to diverse peoples and communities in the world as he and his community knew the world to be. Jesus advanced theological education not with the global (in what he considered by the world) orientation too often permeates the church and its educators’ approach in conversations with the Third World.