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FOREWORD

TIMOTHY GEORGE

During the seven years I spent as a student at Harvard Divinity School, I frequently passed through Johnson Gate as I walked across Harvard Yard on my way to Widener Library. A plaque on the northern side of Johnson Gate contains a quotation from *New England's First Fruits* (1640), an early history of the Puritan beginnings of Massachusetts Bay Colony:

After God had carried us safe to New England, and we had builded our houses, provided necessaries for our livelihood, reared convenient places for God's worship, and settled the civil government: One of the next things we longed for, and looked after, was to advance learning and perpetuate it to posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the churches, when our present ministers shall lie in the dust.

Harvard's Puritan forebears determined to establish what they called "a seminary in the wilderness" in order to train ministers of the gospel for the service of the church. Building on the Protestant heritage they had brought with them from the Old World, they wanted to pass on the faith intact to the rising generation. They assumed as something inherent in the nature of civil and humane society itself that *education* and *reformation* belonged invariably together.

The scholars who have contributed to this handbook represent evangelical theological schools and denominations which, at their best, have also stressed the coinherence of intellect and piety. But the fact is, we evangelicals have not always been at our best. We have often been contrarians and reactionaries. We have found it difficult to hold intellectual rigor and spiritual nurture in equipoise. Cotton Mather once reported that when

his famous grandfather, John Cotton, was a student back in England, at Cambridge, he was worried that “if he became a godly man, t’would spoil him in being a *learned* one.” But, of course, the opposite is also true. We can all think of students we have known who, in the process of becoming learned, have forgotten to be godly.

One of the themes that courses through this volume is the deadliness of such a dichotomy. Not so many years ago, few if any Protestant or evangelical seminaries paid much attention to spiritual formation. That was something the Catholics did! Now our accreditation standards hold us all accountable for the spiritual nurture of our students. Genuine theological education should aim for transformation, not the mere transfer of cognitive data from one mind to another. We can be satisfied with neither rigid intellectualism on the one hand nor unreflective sentimentalism on the other. Our aim ought to be rather head and heart together, puritanism and pietism, both together at their best. As Thomas Aquinas, echoing Augustine, put it, “Theology is taught by God, teaches God, and takes us to God.”

But how to do this in a school that cultivates at once the life of the mind and the flourishing of the soul? It has now been more than two hundred years since Friedrich Schleiermacher published his *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology* (1811), establishing thereby a *ratio studiorum* for the various disciplines within a theological faculty. This well-tested fourfold schema (biblical, historical, systematic, practical) has served many generations of theological students and, with some modifications, remains intact in most seminaries to this day. But this pedagogical pattern has brought more disparity than clarity to the task of theological education. As Kevin Vanhoozer puts it, Schleiermacher’s model “draws and quarters the body of theology into different members, distinct areas of specialization that, like the fallen Humpty Dumpty, cannot easily be put back together.”

This has resulted in the loss of a coherent theological vision, as more and more theological teachers seek a sense of *primary* identification with a professional guild of like-minded scholars. Add to this a disjointed cafeteria-styled curricula, and the graduation of typical (stereotypical?) seminary “products” who are not theologians in any serious sense of the word. This problem is not unique to evangelical theological schools, but neither are they exempt from it. Some of the essays in this volume define and defend traditional disciplines within the body of divinity, seeking to

show connections across the curriculum. Others suggest ways of addressing and overcoming fragmentation itself.

Max Stackhouse once defined the task of theological education as the shaping of ministers formed by the “warranted wisdom” and “grounded *scientia*” of the Christian tradition. For evangelicals, the precise *warranting* and *grounding* of this work must be defined both in terms of a specific doctrinal content and a foundation of *praxis*. Cardinal Newman wrote that “nothing is easier than to use the word ‘God’ and mean nothing by it.” Theological seminaries exist to serve the mission of God—the covenantal God of the Bible, the one, true, eternal, living, triune God of holiness and love—and this means prayer and worship are not ancillary but central to their core identity.

A theological seminary is not a church, but it is a school of the church, and all who study, work, and teach in such a school share a sacred calling. Lesslie Newbigin reminded us that the church of Jesus Christ is the embodiment of gospel truth made alive in the power of the Holy Spirit. The church is not only the most effective apologetic for the Christian message in our increasingly fragile and fragmented world, but it is also the only one likely to get a hearing in such a world. The ecclesial vocation of theological education requires all of us to pray and work for healthier churches, for our theological schools will not flourish without faithful communities of God’s people to join them in partnerships of prayer and mutual support.

Theological education over the next decades of the twenty-first century will need to be increasingly personal, incarnational, global, and gospel centered. It will also need to take the longer view and remember the summons to humility found in these words by Reinhold Niebuhr:

Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in a life time;
therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or
beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate con-
text of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we
do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone. Therefore we
are saved by love.

PREFACE

Theology, Church, and Ministry: A Handbook for Theological Education has been designed to introduce readers to the place that theological education plays in preparing God-called ministers for service in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The initial section seeks to help readers understand what theological education is, how it has developed, and the role it has in providing formation and preparation for ministry. The second section surveys the heart of a theological education curriculum including the study of biblical languages; the introduction to the Old and New Testaments; the importance of biblical inspiration and hermeneutics; the place of biblical, systematic, and historical theology; along with the significant areas of ethics and apologetics. The final section of this volume aims to help readers see the connection between theology, church, and ministry with an eye toward preaching, pastoral ministry, worship, evangelism, missions, and worldview formation. The final chapters help readers connect theological education to the church, and to the ever-expanding need to understand the importance of the global church.

There has been no effort to conform the chapters to a uniform approach. Each author, dealing with his or her subject, has been given the freedom to shape the chapter in light of an overall purpose, which is to show the importance of theological education for the church, and the importance of each subject for the work of theological education. Because the study of languages differs from the study of theology, which differs from preaching, we believe readers will get a better sense of the various subject matters and approaches to the overall work of theological education by allowing each chapter to be so developed.

A volume of this kind cannot address every discipline that is taught at seminaries and divinity schools. A second volume would be needed to

include chapters on church music, Christian education, pastoral counseling, psychology of religion, world religions, sociology of religion, church leadership, church recreation, demographically based ministries (such as ministry to singles, youth, children, and seniors), as well as other topics. The chapters that are included primarily focus on preparation for pastoral ministry and those areas that are foundational for all types of ministry.

Each chapter provides a broad survey and introduction of the field, helping the readers understand why these areas of study are important for theological education, while also pointing to some initial steps that indicate how the subject of the chapter relates to the larger field of theological education. This handbook is an introductory study that has been prepared for prospective theological students, interested donors and friends, as well as board members who guide and direct institutions across this country and around the world. The goal of this volume is to help all of us involved in the work of theological education better understand its importance for the life of the church. Each chapter points readers beyond what is found therein with helpful questions (“Questions for Further Reflection”) and a list of books or key articles (“Sources for Further Study”).

I want to thank each contributor for participating in this collaborative effort. Each brings significant experience and expertise to this work. Hopefully the various perspectives representing numerous institutional and denominational backgrounds will produce a pleasing symphonic harmony for our readers. In addition, I want to offer a word of appreciation to Chris Thompson and Jim Baird for their guidance for this volume. I am grateful for the encouragement offered by Jean Myers and the conscientious assistance provided by Lisa Weathers. Lisa’s careful attention to each step of this project has been a true gift. Finally, I want to say a big “thank you” to my wife, Lanese, who has provided prayer support for yet another writing project. Our prayer is that many will be helped by this volume, that the church will be strengthened, and that our great God will be glorified.

Soli Deo Gloria

David S. Dockery

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SECTION ONE

*Theological Education:
An Introduction*

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: AN INTRODUCTION

DAVID S. DOCKERY

*“Make disciples of all nations . . .
teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.”*

—MATTHEW 28:19–20

“You heard about him and were taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.”

—EPHESIANS 4:21

“Holding to the faithful message as taught.”

—TITUS 1:9

Theological education in the twenty-first century must carry out the essential teaching task commissioned by the risen Christ (Matt 28:19–20). Based on Paul’s teaching in Eph 4:11–16, the church has attempted to carry out this charge since the first century. The goals of this teaching ministry are threefold: to build up the church, to lead it to maturity in faith, and to lead it to unity.¹ Those goals continue to be the focus of the teaching arm of the church, which is a function that belongs to institutions of theological education. Theological education must be academically sound; it must be grounded in the Scriptures; it must be Christ centered; and it must be

1. See Robert L. Saucy, “Doing Theology for the Church,” in *The Necessity of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Jefferson Davis (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 61–74.

ministry and mission focused. Theological educators need to be sensitive to the changes in the churches and in society. They also need courage to lead and a listening ear to respond to the churches; indeed, it is a two-way street.²

Theological institutions have a responsibility to prepare ministers for the issues they will encounter in the churches while remaining focused on the classical disciplines of theology.³ Theological education at its best focuses on head, heart, and hands. If those involved in the work of theological education focus only on the head, we will have ministers who are well informed but not Christianly formed. Theological education in the twenty-first century must help people develop (1) a theologically informed way of seeing the world (the head), (2) Christian responses to life (the heart), and (3) Christian strategies and motivations for ministry (hands). We believe this full-orbed understanding can only be addressed when we understand that theology and theological understanding find their focus in the church.⁴ The history of the church has been intertwined with this important work, even though most historians locate the first freestanding seminary in the early nineteenth century.⁵ Let us turn our attention to a brief look at these key developments throughout the history of the church.⁶

From the New Testament Period to the Time of Augustine

Little difference can be discerned between the theological preparation provided for church members and that designed for church leaders in the apostolic and postapostolic periods. Pastors and church leaders were called to ongoing study (2 Tim 2:15) in order to provide oversight for the ministry of the Word of God in the midst of worship services, as well as to train and disciple new converts (2 Tim 2:2; Titus 1:9).

2. See David S. Dockery, "Ministry and Seminary in a New Century," *Southern Seminary Magazine* 62:2 (1994): 20–22.

3. See David S. Dockery, "A Theology for the Church," *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 1, no. 1 (2003): 10–20.

4. See John Frame, "Studying Theology as a Servant of Jesus," *Reformation and Renewal* 11, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 45–69; and Craig S. Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 257–66.

5. See George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 74.

6. See Michael Reeves, *Theologians You Should Know. An Introduction: From the Apostolic Fathers to the 21st Century* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), for an introduction to the thinkers who have shaped theological education through the years.

Apostolic Period

The apostle Paul, writing to the church at Thessalonica, urged followers of Jesus Christ to “stand firm and hold to the traditions you were taught, whether by what we said or what we wrote” (2 Thess 2:15). Similarly the apostle exhorted Timothy, his apostolic legate, to “hold on to the pattern of sound teaching” (2 Tim 1:13). The history of Christianity is best understood as a chain of memory.⁷

Wherever the Christian faith has been found, there has been close association with the written Word of God, with books, education, and learning. Studying and interpreting the Bible became natural for members of the early Christian community, having inherited the practice from late Judaism.⁸

The tradition that would eventually shape more formal approaches to theological education locates its roots in the interpretation of Holy Scripture. From the earliest days of Christian history, Christians have used the Bible in various ways.⁹ The rich heritage has shaped the Christian tradition on both individual and corporate practices. Some of these include (1) the Bible as a source for information and understanding of life, (2) the Bible as a guide for worship, (3) the Bible as a wellspring to formulate Christian liturgy, (4) the Bible as a primary source for the formulation of theology, (5) the Bible as a text for preaching or teaching, (6) the Bible as a guide for pastoral care, (7) the Bible as a foundation for spiritual formation, and (8) the Bible as the model for literary and aesthetic enjoyment.

Postapostolic Tradition

Beginning in the second century, some of these uses of the Bible started to shape the early stages of theological education in the church, which was shaped by a shared faith in the uniqueness and significance of Jesus of Nazareth. Formal training by the time of the second century, during

7. See Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); David S. Dockery and Timothy George, *The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking* (Grand Rapids: Crossway, 2012); and John Rogerson, Christopher Rowland, and Barnabas Lindars, *The History of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

8. See Virginia Stem Owens, “Fiction and the Bible,” *Reformed Journal* 38 (July 1988): 12–13; and Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

9. See Karfried Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); and Gerald Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996).

the time of Justin Martyr (100–165), Irenaeus (125–202), and Tertullian (150–225), tended to focus in areas of philosophy and rhetoric.¹⁰

The authority of the church, the canon, and efforts toward theological formation had reached new heights by the beginning of the third century, which saw the rise of schools, intertwined with classical learning, science, philosophy, and centers of art. Steps toward serious biblical interpretation and theological education began to develop and mature in the schools of Alexandria and Antioch.¹¹ During this time Origen (185–254) and Clement (150–215) provided creative leadership for the Alexandrians, while John Chrysostom (349–407) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (350–428) greatly influenced developments in Antioch. The Alexandrians looked to the rule of faith and mystical interpretation as key sources for shaping theological education for the people of God. The Antiochenes looked to reason and the historical development of Scripture as the foci for understanding Christian thought.

Athanasius (296–371), more than anyone else during the fourth century, shaped the church's understanding of the expanding rule of faith, which became the framework for theological understanding and catechesis. The brilliant fourth-century theologian greatly influenced the three great Cappadocian fathers: Basil of Caesarea (ca. 329–379), his brother Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 330–395), and his friend Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 330–389). In this splendid trio the subject matters for theological education with the orthodox statements about Jesus Christ and the trinitarian God reached their climax. Because of the Christological debates in the fourth and fifth centuries, church leaders became more theologically oriented in their approach to reading Scripture. The consistent articulation of the church's orthodox faith, coupled with pastoral concerns for the edification of the faithful, provided norms for the shaping and advancement of the work of theological instruction.¹²

10. See Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966); Robert M. Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988); and J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978).

11. See Alloys Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, vol. I, *From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon* (451), trans. by John Bowden, 2nd ed. (Atlanta: John Knox, 1974); R. V. Sellers, *Two Ancient Christologies: A Study in the Christological Thought of the Schools of Alexandria and Antioch in the Early History of Christian Doctrine* (London: SPCK, 1954); and Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Preaching of Chrysostom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).

12. See Craig A. Blaising, *Athanasius* (Lanham, MD: University Press, 1992); Gerald L. Bray, *Creeeds, Councils and Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984), 92–171.

The Influence of Augustine

The father of the Christian intellectual tradition and the most influential shaper of Christian theology during the first thousand years of church history was Augustine (351–430).¹³ He gladly upheld the authority of the rule of faith, thus shaping the confessional tradition, as had no one before him. Augustine’s brilliance could hold together creativity and creed; author, text, and interpreter; the historical and the figurative/allegorical; as well as faith and reason.¹⁴

In holding together faith and reason, Augustine paved the way for future theologians and theological educators. He provided a model for thinking Christianly about the world, stressing the priority of faith for understanding God’s revelation to humanity in creation, experience, and ultimately in Jesus Christ and Holy Scripture.¹⁵ In doing so Augustine always stressed that biblical interpretation and Christian thinking about all aspects of life should encourage love for God, for the church, and for neighbor. Augustine’s influence on the shape of the Christian intellectual tradition and theological education has been, in many ways, incalculable. Some even suggest that the work of shaping the theological tradition over the past fifteen hundred years is best understood as a footnote to the work of Augustine. Augustine left for following generations the legacy of a monastic life committed to study, evidenced by his prolific writings.¹⁶

Justo González has noted that during this time the practice also arose of employing monastic life as an opportunity to study. The monastic schools began to occupy a central place in European intellectual life as well as for those preparing for ministry. While what can be called theological education greatly advanced during this period, we must recognize that there were still no formal schools for the preparation of ministers. Personal mentoring, guidance, and teaching from pastors and bishops, including Augustine himself, remained the primary model for theological education.¹⁷

13. See Matthew Levering, *The Theology of Augustine* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013).

14. See Robert E. Cushman, “Faith and Reason,” in *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine*, ed. Roy W. Battenhouse (New York: Oxford, 1955), 290–94.

15. See Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Early Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952).

16. See Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

17. See Justo L. González, *The History of Theological Education* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015), 19–23.

The Medieval and Reformation Periods

These important centuries were shaped and introduced by the ecumenical councils of the church (325–787).¹⁸ As the church expanded and matured, it also faced new and greater challenges concerning the church's beliefs. How should the Trinity be believed and proclaimed? If Jesus Christ is fully God, how can he simultaneously be fully human? If Jesus Christ is one person, how do we understand his two natures and two wills? What is meant by the phrase, "the Holy Spirit, the life giver"? Questions regarding the Trinity, the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and the nature and sinfulness of humanity ushered in and characterized the years known as the medieval period. This was a time when the church's understandings of its leadership and organization were developing into their hierarchical form. The theological tradition during this time was challenged, expanded, and strengthened, particularly through the efforts of Anselm (1033–1109), Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274).¹⁹

Medieval Education

The students of these outstanding thinkers for the most part became pastors, but these teachers of the church did not perceive of their role as primarily preparing people for ministry. In seeking to prioritize and advance the Christian intellectual tradition, they helped provide a prominent place for the developing universities birthed during these years. While early Christian education emphasized catechetical purposes, medieval universities were largely shaped for the purpose of professional education, with some general education for the elite. Of the seventy-nine universities in existence in Europe during this time, Salerno was best known for medicine, Bologna for law, and Paris for theology.²⁰ Thus the aim of most medieval institutions was not focused on ministerial education so much as philosophical and contemplative inquiries.²¹

18. See Gerald Bray, *Creeeds, Councils and Christ: Did the Early Christians Misrepresent Jesus?* (Dublin: Mentor, 2009).

19. See William C. Placher, *A History of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 146.

20. See Jonathan Hill, *The History of Christian Thought* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 131–60.

21. See Mark Noll, "Reconsidering Christendom," in *The Future of Christian Learning*, ed. Thomas A. Howard (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008), 23–70; and Alister McGrath, *The Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 11–117.

Nowhere was this kind of serious Christian engagement better seen in this medieval context than in the work of Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas carried on a multisided conversation with the biblical text, the church fathers, and Aristotle. Simultaneously, he invested in both dialogical and apologetical responses to Muslim and Jewish thinkers such as Averroes and Maimonides. Before and after the Reformation, the work of Aquinas greatly influenced Roman Catholic thinkers as well as Protestant philosophers.²²

Aquinas and other medieval thinkers flourished in a context where the Christian faith provided shape and illumination for the intellectual landscape and the central mission of the university generally focused on inquiry in pursuit of truth. Faith in the context of medieval Christendom was understood to be an indispensable ally, not an enemy, of reason and intellectual exploration. Since the medieval period, Christian universities which arose *ex corde ecclesia*, “from the heart of the church,” have been one of the primary places where the Christian faith has been advanced and from which formal ministerial education began to take shape.²³

The Renaissance

The Renaissance envisioned the revival of Greek and Roman literature while newer subjects were developing during the medieval periods such as arithmetic, geometry, and music. The Reformation period placed education within the context of a Christian worldview. While Martin Luther (1483–1546) is widely recognized as the father of the Reformation, in reality he, in many ways, carried forward the work of Peter Waldo (1140–1218), John Wycliffe (1330–1384), Jon Hus (1373–1415), Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498), and even Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536). All of these prioritized the Scriptures in bold ways, but Erasmus (even more so than Luther), through the influence of John Colet (1466–1519), rediscovered the priority of the historical sense of biblical interpretation.²⁴

22. See E. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L. K. Shook (London: Victor Gollancz, 1957).

23. John J. Piderit, “The University at the Heart of the Church,” *First Things* 94 (June/July 1999): 22–25; see also David C. Steinmetz, “The Superiority of Pre-critical Exegesis,” *Theology Today* 27 (1980): 31–32.

24. See David S. Dockery, “The History of Pre-critical Interpretation,” *Faith and Mission* 10 (1992): 3–33; and David S. Dockery, “Foundations for Reformation Hermeneutics: A Fresh Look at Erasmus,” in *Evangelical Hermeneutics*, ed. M. Bauman and D. Hall (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1995), 53–76.

Erasmus exemplified the finest in Renaissance scholarship, which emphasized the priority of the original sources (*ad fontes*). The ultimate source to which Erasmus turned was the Greek New Testament.²⁵ Coupled with his emphasis on the sources was a truly historical understanding of ancient texts, yet he also desired for the biblical texts to bring edification to the readers through the spiritual sense. As significant and as innovative was the work of Erasmus, the pivotal and shaping figures of the Reformation were Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564).

Reformation Initiatives

Luther, reclaiming the key aspects of the Augustinian tradition, also insisted that the Bible itself is its own best interpreter. This commitment rested on the foundation of a complete trust in the Bible's truthfulness and authority. Believing that the God of truth had spoken in Scripture, Luther likewise believed humans must stand under the authority of the Bible. Scripture provided the framework for seeing all of life and for understanding all human thinking because, for Luther, the Bible was the Word of God itself. Luther thought deeply about the relationship between faith and reason, demanding that the human intellect adjust itself to the teachings of Holy Scripture.²⁶ Luther's bold advances have influenced Christian thinkers and the works of theological education for five centuries, yet John Calvin in a sense "out-Luthered" Luther to shape aspects of the Christian intellectual tradition that have developed since the sixteenth century.

John Calvin was the finest interpreter of Scripture and the most precise Christian thinker of this period. Even a rival such as Jacob Arminius claimed that Calvin's work was incomparable, saying, "He stands above others, above most, indeed, above all."²⁷ Calvin stressed education, providing a catechetical system that has been carried all over the world. Calvin's theology, best seen in the final edition of his *Institutes*

25. See J. H. Bentley, *Humanist and the Holy Writ* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 115–26; and A. Rabil, *Erasmus and the New Testament: The Mind of a Christian Humanist* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1972), 43–45.

26. See David S. Dockery, "Martin Luther's Christological Hermeneutics," *Grace Theological Journal* 2 (1983): 189–203.

27. Cited by C. Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 287–88.

of the *Christian Religion* (1559), influenced large sectors of Europe, Old and New England.²⁸

Yet Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560) more than anyone else in the Reformation period advanced theological education initiatives. More than fifty cities sought his help in his role as educator and theologian.²⁹ His *Loci Communes* (1521), the first systematic expression of Lutheran ideas, gained widespread influence due to its clear and irenic approach. He helped to reform eight universities and to found four others. From his chair of Greek literature at Wittenberg, Melanchthon penned numerous textbooks for use in many academies, schools, and institutions. These things earned him the title of “Preceptor of Germany.”³⁰

Melanchthon proposed a new theological curriculum that emphasized the study of Scripture in the original languages. He proposed beginning with the study of Romans, then moving to the rest of the New Testament, then to the Old Testament, and concluding with the study of the Gospel of John. The study of theology began with the study of God, moving to the doctrines of creation, sin, redemption, law, and gospel, and concluding with eschatology. Hundreds flocked to the University of Wittenberg to prepare themselves for faithful services in churches and schools. From this period came the threefold aspects of the curriculum that have influenced the shape of theological education for nearly five centuries: (1) the study of the Bible and its interpretation, (2) the study of doctrinal theology, and (3) the application of these subjects with special attention to the practical administration of churches, preaching, worshipping, and ministry. Formal theological studies became a requirement for ministerial ordination during the sixteenth century. Prior to this time such requirements had not been put in place, but this practice has continued to be the expectation in most traditions up to the present time.³¹

28. P. A. Verhoef, “Luther and Calvin’s Exegetical Library,” *Concordia Theological Journal* 3 (1968): 5–20; B. A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); see Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: B&H, 2013), 171–265.

29. See Gregory B. Graybill, *The Honeycomb Scroll: Philip Melanchthon at the Dawn of the Reformation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 145–337.

30. González, *The History of Theological Education*, 70–77; see also Thomas A. Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 60–79.

31. *Ibid.*

Roman Catholic Education

A brief note about Roman Catholic theological education during these years seems important to add. Monastic schools, characteristic of the medieval years, merged with the newer humanistic approaches. The Council of Trent (1545–1563) provided a careful and detailed response to the Lutheran Reformation, particularly related to the role of tradition in relationship to Scripture, as well as the meaning, role, and importance of the sacraments in the life of the church.³² The decrees of Trent restricted theological education to the context of seminary, which was understood as a quasi-monastic institution influenced by the University of Paris, that provided a spiritual community for the purposes of theological and ministerial formation. A central place was given to the reading of patristic and classical texts in their original languages. This approach to theological education continued with minimal changes until the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s.³³

The Post-Reformation and Modern Periods

Tracking the streams that influenced the practice and shape of theological education during the church's first sixteen centuries has led us through the work of the second-century apologists, the Alexandrian and Antiochene schools, Augustine, the medieval thinkers and monastic, and the Reformers and reform movements. By the seventeenth century these streams proliferated, resulting in both fragmentation and greater variety of the expressions of the Christian movement.³⁴

The Enlightenment

Many aspects of the expansion were good and helpful as the Christian message began to circle the globe. On the other hand, the vast influence of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought challenged the very heart of the Christian faith, raising questions about authority, tradition, and the role of reason. The Enlightenment, which blossomed in the eighteenth

32. See John W. O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

33. González, *The History of Theological Education*, 79–85; see John L. Elias, *A History of Christian Education: Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Perspectives* (Malabar, FL: Krieger, 2002), 191–222. For additional discussion of Orthodox education beyond our treatment in this chapter, see 223–53.

34. See David S. Dockery, "Denominationalism: Historical Developments, Contemporary Challenges, and Global Opportunities," in *Why We Belong: Evangelical Unity and Denominational Diversity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013) 177–209.

century, was a watershed in the history of Western civilization. The Christian consensus that had existed from the fourth through the sixteenth centuries was hampered, if not broken, by a radical secular spirit. Enlightenment philosophy could be characterized by its stress on the primacy of nature and reason over special revelation. Along with this elevated view of reason, the movement reflected a low view of sin, an antisupernatural bias, and an ongoing questioning of the place of authority and tradition.³⁵

The Contribution of Friedrich Schleiermacher

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) led the way with his efforts to synthesize the Christian faith with Enlightenment ideas. With his book *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers* (1799), Schleiermacher called for a way in which the Christian faith could be heard afresh in a rapidly changing culture, attempting to adapt the Christian faith to a new mode of thinking. Such efforts to translate the Christian faith to the changing times were not just attempts to make the Christian faith relevant or to bring Christianity to a place where it could be heard afresh. This new movement, known as liberalism, transformed the Christian faith into something quite different. Accompanying these trends, Schleiermacher brought new approaches to theological education.³⁶ Schleiermacher's thinking was formed in a pietistic context, yet he rejected the core of pietism. This vision for theological education can be followed in his 1811 publication, *Brief Outline of Theological Studies*. Here he proposed three curricular categories: philosophical theology, dogmatic theology, and pastoral theology, which evidenced some continuity but mostly discontinuity with Melancthon's approach.

Philosophical theology attempted to study and articulate a particular form of the feeling of dependence on God and its place and context of other religious feelings, which included philosophy of religion and comparative religions. Dogmatic theology was the study of the teachings of the church at a given moment and particularly in the present. Schleiermacher contended that theology should be radically Christocentric in order to

35. See G. R. Evans, *History of Heresy* (London: Blackwell, 2003); and Colin Brown, *Christianity and Western Thought: A History of Philosophers, Ideas, and Movements* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990) 173–340.

36. See C. W. Christian, *Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Waco: Word, 1979); Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion: 1805–1900* (Louisville: WJK, 2001), xiii–xxv; and Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University*, 178–211.

serve the church as a concrete community of faith. Dogmatic theology also included the critical study of the Bible and historical theology, while pastoral theology included all that is necessary to function as a minister in the church.³⁷ Schleiermacher initiated a trajectory that emphasized critical studies which, contrary to Schleiermacher's intention, tended to separate the study of theology from the life of the church, creating a tension between the academy and the congregations. One of the purposes of this volume is to show and underscore the importance of carrying out the work of theological education for the sake of the church by developing pastor-theologians, biblical expositors, and faithful ministers.

American Theological Education

Early American colleges governed by trustees from related religious groups provided education within the context of faith and grounded in the pursuit of truth for Christ and his church.³⁸ The schools, by the early nineteenth century, faced similar challenges to those associated with Schleiermacher and the University of Berlin. The German model espousing research and academic freedom began to influence American theological education in the nineteenth century. For formal ministerial education, college graduates remained for at least one additional year to study the body of divinity with the president and a professor of theology, while working in an intern-like role with a pastor or by serving as a tutor for other students.

Andover

The first freestanding seminary, Andover in Massachusetts, was birthed in 1808 as an expression of protest against the drift toward liberalism and Unitarianism in the New England colleges, especially at Harvard. Other seminaries followed, including Princeton (1812), Union of Virginia (1824), Newton (1825), Mercersburg (1836), Union of New York (1836), and Southern Baptist Seminary (1859). Seminary enrollment expanded

37. See James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Vatican II* (New York: MacMillan, 1971), 96–114; and Roger E. Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology: From Reconstruction to Deconstruction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013), 130–46. A contrary vision to Schleiermacher's was developed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. See his *Theological Education Underground: 1937–1940*, ed. Dirk Schulz and Victoria J. Barnett (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012).

38. See E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

rapidly during the first half of the nineteenth century. Most of the seminaries started during this century had strong denominational ties with the Presbyterian, Congregational, Lutheran, Episcopal, and Baptist denominations.³⁹ Three examples of different visions for theological institutions illustrate the streams and trajectories for theological education that developed during the nineteenth century.

Princeton

Andover and Princeton offered a curricular trajectory, in continuity with Melancthon's efforts in the sixteenth century, that has shaped American theological education for two hundred years. The three-year program included biblical studies, theological studies, and studies in the practice of ministry, which remain the areas of focus for the volume. Both institutions, based on their institutional charters, were established to advance orthodox and scholarly Calvinism.⁴⁰ Princeton, in particular, under the leadership of Charles Hodge (1797–1878), A. A. Hodge (1823–1886), and B. B. Warfield (1851–1921), pushed against the Schleiermachiian approach to theology with its developing liberalism and critical approach to biblical studies.⁴¹ The impact of Princeton Seminary lives on at numerous Presbyterian and evangelical institutions today.⁴²

Mercersburg

The Mercersburg theological tradition was led by John Williamson Nevin (1803–1886) and Philip Schaff (1819–1893). Mercersburg advanced a Christocentric theological approach emphasizing the consensus of the early church councils, the best of Lutheran and Reformed scholarship, warm-hearted piety, a commitment to formal worship patterns and practices, and an appreciation of early church traditions to counter the shallow revivalism

39. See Glenn T. Miller, *Piety and Intellect: The Aims and Purpose of Ante-Bellum Theological Education* (Atlanta: Scholars' Press, 1990).

40. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 74–197.

41. See Mark A. Noll, ed., *The Princeton Theology 1812–1921: Scripture, Science and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); Paul Helseth, *Right Reason and the Princeton Mind* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2010); and Bradley J. Gundlach, *Process and Providence: The Evolution Question at Princeton, 1845–1929* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

42. See W. Andrew Hoffecker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians: Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and Benjamin Warfield* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1981).

of the day as well as the progressive drift taking place in other schools and churches.⁴³

Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In many ways The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, founded in 1859, has been the pioneer in theological education. Beginning with the threefold vision of the founding president, James P. Boyce (1827–1888), Southern Seminary emphasized confessional and orthodox theology, stressed serious scholarship in service to the church, and opened the doors for those lacking educational privilege through the study of the English Bible. This vision provided a distinctive Baptist and congregationalist approach to theological education in the nineteenth century.⁴⁴

Southern was one of the first seminaries to develop a research doctoral program at the end of the nineteenth century. With the development of a university model for seminary education with separate schools within the institution, Southern advanced curriculum programs for world religions and missions, Christian education, pastoral counseling and psychology of religion, church music, social work, and church growth.⁴⁵ These initiatives provided opportunity for enlargement in the subject matter to be taught, increased the number of electives for students, addressed developing needs in multistaff churches, and opened doors for advanced graduate study for Southern graduates.⁴⁶

The struggle within denominations, the expansion of nondenominational churches and parachurch movements, and the doctrinal tensions growing out of the modernist-fundamentalist divide in the first half of the twentieth century have created both creative opportunities and new challenges for theological education in the twentieth and twenty-first

43. See Luigi Giussani, *American Protestant Theology* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 48–51.

44. Gregory A. Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 1859–2009* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1–52; see Thomas J. Nettles, *James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesman* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2009), 106–35; and Timothy George, *James Petigru Boyce: Selected Writings* (Nashville: Broadman, 1989), 30–59.

45. See David S. Dockery, "Southern Seminary and the Theological Heritage of Southern Baptists," *Southern Seminary Magazine* 63:2 (1995): 2–5.

46. See Glenn T. Miller, *Piety and Profession: American Protestant Theological Education, 1870–1970* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 499–506; and William Brackney, *Congregation and Campus* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 2008).

centuries.⁴⁷ The Association of Theological Schools noted that by 2016 there were more than 270 accredited institutions representing a wide range of Protestant, Evangelical, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox institutions of theological education reflecting a broad spectrum of doctrinal, ecclesiastical, and theological perspectives. One of the purposes of this volume is to enhance theological education grounded in the message of the gospel in service to the church, the academy, and the public square for the present day in light of the various themes addressed in this chapter.⁴⁸

Theology, Theological Education, and the Church

At the heart of a theological seminary is the study of theology.⁴⁹ For too many people, however, the province of theology is not the church but is limited to the realm of the specialist in the academic world. Christian theology should be at the heart of theological education and should engage the broader academic world as well as society at large; there is a rightful place for a public theology. Ultimately, however, theology is for the church.⁵⁰

Theology

Theology is certainly not the whole of church life, but there must be a place for the true intellectual love of God, for Jesus has commanded his followers to love God with heart, soul, strength, and mind, and to love one's neighbor as well (Matt 22:37–39). Certainly this should not lead to some cold intellectual approach to the faith unaccompanied by affection. For too many people, theology is a kind of intellectual aloofness or uncommitted intellectual curiosity.⁵¹

47. See Miller, *Piety and Profession*, 404–50; and Miller, *Piety and Plurality: Theological Education Since 1960* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014).

48. See other proposals for the life and work of theological education: David H. Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological About a Theological School* (Louisville: WJKP, 1992); Robert J. Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); David H. Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Daniel O. Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008); and Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education* (Columbia, CA: Langham Global Library, 2014).

49. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 183–88; and R. Albert Mohler, "The Pastor as Theologian" in Daniel L. Akin, ed., *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 723–28.

50. See Akin, *Theology for the Church*; and John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 67–80.

51. *Ibid.*

Theology renders service to the church in many ways. It satisfies the mind so that we can know God (Jer 9:23–24) and know the living Christ (Phil 3:10–14). Theology is necessary for the church’s teaching and apologetic tasks (1 Pet 3:15). Theology is important as a touchstone for understanding what the church believes and for recognizing the principles by which the allegiance of its members will be judged. Such beliefs and practices come from serious theological reflection. Theology also points to ethics. If the church is to live in the world with a lifestyle that brings glory to God, then we must learn to think deeply—to deal not only with issues of personal ethics but also with the implications of the biblical faith for social, economic, and political ethics.⁵²

Theology is more than God’s words for me as an individual; theology is God’s words for the church, the community of faith. It is important that we understand theology in both individual and community perspectives. If the church is central to God’s plan, then we cannot push to the edge what is central for God.⁵³ Theological education is an effort to equip ministers and church leaders for the building up of the church (Eph 4:13–16). Equipping involves moving believers toward the unity of the faith and a maturity of the faith that has the full knowledge of God’s Son. The kind of maturity described in Ephesians 4 needs a carefully articulated theological foundation that will lead the church away from instability and gullibility toward wisdom, trust, and discernment.⁵⁴

Theological Education

Likewise, the building up of the people of God results in the advancement of the gospel mission. In actualizing that mission, the church is called to be faithful, to discern, to interpret, and to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ as the transforming power for the world. The responsibility for making theology applicable for the church rests with theological educators. The work of serious scholarship by theological educators remains essential, but we must seek to eliminate the academy-versus-church or scholar-versus-practitioner dichotomy that tends to magnify specialization, leading to fragmentation of mission and disconnection from the

52. See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 18–38.

53. See Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 1–34.

54. See the discussion of theological education in David S. Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 134–63.

church.⁵⁵ We need theological educators who can write and communicate in ways that are both accessible to, and engaging of, the church and the culture. Church leaders and theologians throughout history have frequently commended the biblical writers for their clarity, simplicity, and brevity. Theological educators would be wise to emulate and prioritize these characteristics for the days ahead. Theological educators have the responsibility to help the church articulate what it believes, practices, and proclaims primarily for the good of believers, as well as for a watching world.⁵⁶

Theology and healthy theological education provide the backbone for the church. The work of theological education, done well, helps develop mature believers, strengthening heart, head, and hands, and resulting in the praise and exaltation of God. Healthy theological education, founded on good theology, should always lead to doxology. Theological education needs to be seen as an extension of the work of the church, similar in importance to evangelism and worship.⁵⁷

The Church

Hopefully this volume will enable readers to understand that church practice based on unsound theology will itself be unsound and even dangerous. Church leaders who have been well prepared will help church members better understand the Christian faith. Believers desire to share their evangelistic efforts, and, moreover, can help lead Christ followers to an awareness and worship of the grandeur, the greatness, and goodness of the one true and wise God. Theological education can also provide resources for God's people to recover a true understanding of human life. In this sense God's people can once again gain a sense of the greatness of the soul. In doing so, the people of God can recover an awareness that God is more important than we are, that the future life is more important than this one, and that a

55. See Miroslav Volf, ed., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

56. See Robert L. Saucy, "Doing Theology for the Church" in John Jefferson David, ed., *The Necessity of Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978).

57. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Pictures at a Theological Exposition: Scenes of the Church's Worship, Witness, and Wisdom* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2016).

right view of God provides genuine significance and security for the living of these days.⁵⁸

The church can better understand what it believes and why these things should be believed. When the church carries out this theological task, and when theological education is church centered and church focused, the true content of the faith, the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), can be preserved and proclaimed in churches in the United States and around the globe.⁵⁹ The future of theological education must prioritize commitments to intercultural and international initiatives. Faithful theological education affirms for the churches that the Bible is the living Word of God written. Christ is the living Word of God revealed in it, and the Holy Spirit is the voice of God in it revealing Christ to the church. Understanding these truths in the context of Christian history offers insight for today and guidance for the future, preserving the church from wrongheaded fads. Knowledge of the past keeps the church from confusing what is merely a contemporary expression from that which is enduringly relevant.⁶⁰ We pray that these understandings and commitments will help ensure the faithful work of theological educators as they prepare the next generation of ministers for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A Hopeful Future

We need institutions of theological education to recommit themselves to academic excellence in teaching and scholarship, in research and service, as well as in personal discipleship and churchmanship. At the same time, we must lay hold of the best of the Christian theological tradition and carry it forward to engage the culture and the academy. Service on behalf of faithful evangelical education is a distinctive calling.⁶¹ Those of us who have

58. See Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Daniel J. Trier, *Theology and the Mirror of Scripture: A Mere Evangelical Account* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2015); and J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1993).

59. See Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007); and Michael F. Bird, *What Christians Ought to Believe: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine Through the Apostles' Creed* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

60. See Gerald Bray, *God Has Spoken: A History of Christian Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014); and John D. Hannah, *Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001).

61. See Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978), 7–20; and David S. Dockery, “Evangelicalism: Past, Present, and Future,” *Trinity Journal* 36NS (2015): 3–21. A vision for an evangelical ecumenism has been carefully articulated by Timothy George, “The Reformation and the New Ecumenism,” in *Protestantism After 500 Years*, ed. Thomas A. Howard and Mark A. Noll (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 319–32.

contributed to this volume desire to join hands in order to pray and serve together to advance the work of theological education for the good of all concerned and for the glory of our great God.⁶²

Questions for Further Reflection

1. What are some key lessons to be learned from the history of theological education that will be helpful for the work of theological educators in the twenty-first century?
2. What difference does context make for the delivery of theological education?
3. How can churches and denominations work together with theological institutions to strengthen efforts related to the preparation of ministers and those called to serve the people of God?

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62. Several themes in this chapter have been previously published and developed in David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); David S. Dockery, *Renewing Minds: Serving Church and Society in Christian Higher Education* (Nashville: B&H, 2008); Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal*; and Dockery and George, *The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking*.

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Chapter One

THE FOUNDATION AND SHAPE OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

MARK L. BAILEY

Diememe Noelliste has voiced the broad vision for theological education as “the formation of the people of God in the truth and wisdom of God for the purpose of personal renewal and meaningful participation in the fulfillment of the purpose of God in the Church and the world.”¹ Embedded in that statement is a set of components that can be viewed as either complementary or competing, depending on the philosophy of seminary education one affirms. Arguments have been advanced for the primacy of theological training as knowledge, formation, leadership, or mission.² In reality all four are important as evidenced by the defining statement for theological curriculum for those schools that are a part of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) of North America: in a theological school the overarching goal is the development of theological understanding, that is, aptitude for theological reflection and wisdom pertaining to a responsible life in faith. Comprehended in this overarching goal are others such as deepening spiritual awareness, growing in moral sensibility and character, gaining an intellectual grasp of the tradition of a faith community, and acquiring the abilities requisite to the exercise of ministry in that community.³

1. Diememe Noelliste, “Towards a Theology of Theological Education,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 19, no. 3 (July 1995): 299.

2. See Brian Edgar, “The Theology of Theological Education,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 29, no. 3 (July 2005): 208–217.

3. Commission on Accrediting, *General Institutional Standards* (Pittsburgh: Association of Theological Schools, 2010), 5, <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/general-institutional-standards.pdf>.

In order to remain faithful to God and his Word, a few mission-critical questions must be answered for those involved in theological education. What does it look like for a consistent theology to be fleshed out in the educational endeavor of a seminary or graduate school of theology? How will men and women be equipped to have both the character and capability to serve the church of Jesus Christ? Above all, and within all that it endeavors, theological education must demonstrate its affirmation of the authentic faith of the first century on the one hand and be able to articulate that biblical faith to the twenty-first century audience on the other. The purpose of this chapter is to set forth some foundational principles and surface some of the contemporary challenges shaping the cultural landscape of those who would give themselves to the privilege and responsibility of theological education.

Foundational Principles

Biblical in Authority

The commitment to the priority and the authority of Scripture is an integral element of the evangelical tradition. Such a commitment to the Word of God seems foolish to many in an increasingly secular culture, even among the so-called Christians who get unwittingly enamored with that culture. The Bible, as the Word of God, is the supreme authority for sound theology; and a sound theology is foundational for effective ministry preparation. Foundational to the Christian faith is that God really exists and has acted and spoken in history.

The authority of Scripture is rooted in the ultimate Author of Scripture. The Bible itself testifies to the origin, process, character, and reception of Holy Scripture. Second Peter 1:20–21 reveal that the Bible is the result of neither human reasoning nor initiative but owes its origination to the superintending work of the Holy Spirit. “Above all, you know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

Inspiration is that process by which an omnipotent God so guided the human authors of Scripture in the recording of God’s revelation that the end product was the exact Word of God exactly as God wanted to communicate it in the words of the original manuscripts. Men spoke from God

being moved (lit. “carried along”) by the Holy Spirit. According to Paul in 2 Timothy 3:16, the resultant character of that process is that every portion of Scripture is said to be *theopneustos*, the result of the breath or (better yet, in light of Peter’s statement above) the Spirit of God. While God used human authors in the process, only the Bible itself is said to be “inspired.”

First Corinthians 2:9–16 describes the process of the revelation, inspiration, and illumination of the Scriptures. The critical agency of the Holy Spirit is emphasized in all three stages. What humanity would never have otherwise known about the deep truths of God, the Spirit revealed (1 Cor 2:10). By that same Spirit, through the superintended process of inspiration, the thoughts of God have been put into the words of human language (1 Cor 2:11). In addition, the Holy Spirit was not only the Encoder of God’s revelation; he is also the necessary Decoder of that truth. The Bible asserts that without the work of the Spirit, humanity could never receive or comprehend the thoughts of God (1 Cor 2:12). Paul also confirms that only those who possess and are walking by the Spirit can receive and profit from the revealed mind of God through Christ (1 Cor 2:14–16). Neither the unsaved, who are devoid of the Spirit, nor the believer who is living according to the flesh, can adequately comprehend or correctly apply God’s truth to their lives (1 Cor 2:14; 3:1–3).

The Bible as the Word of God is the inspired revelation of the person, work, and revealed will of God. Therefore it must be held as the superior and evaluating authority over human reason, personal experience, or ecclesiastical tradition. Michael Horton contends, “The Church must be reminded that, when the text of Scripture is no longer regulating her doctrine, life, and worship, her authority and power, which is grounded in the Gospel of Christ revealed in Scripture, will soon be lost.”⁴ The church speaks with authority only when it gives proper voice to the revealed Word of God. Jesus never lost sight of this in his own life and ministry, telling his disciples, “For I have not spoken on my own, but the Father himself who sent me has given me a command to say everything I have said. I know that his command is eternal life. So the things that I speak, I speak just as the Father has told me” (John 12:49–50).

4. Michael S. Horton, “Recovering the Plumb Line,” in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel*, John H. Armstrong, ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 246.

What has been called the “formal principle of the Reformation” summarized in the phrase, *Sola Scriptura*, affirms that only those beliefs and practices that rest firmly on scriptural foundations can be regarded as binding on Christians.⁵ Alister McGrath aptly echoes this sentiment: “The only way Christianity can free itself from the subservience to cultural fashion is to ensure that it is firmly grounded in a resource that is independent of that culture. . . . Evangelicalism thus addresses today’s culture without needing to become trapped within that culture.”⁶

The two most significant roles of Scripture are to reveal truth and refute error. The first speaks of the ability of Scripture to convey the truth God intended with divine objectivity. The second provides the correction to the ever-present tendencies of subjectivity on the part of its interpreters. The Bible is foundational for both objective truth and personal relevance. Everything is changing, and seminaries must change to stay effective—not change for the sake of changing but for the sake of fulfilling their missions. But what must not change is the commitment to the truth of the inerrant Scriptures.

If the authority of the Bible is sourced in its ultimate Author, then the *whole* of what God has said is the necessary foundation for all theological education. Few are the schools who teach their students the whole Bible. Robert Jensen states, “Scripture’s story is not part of some larger narrative, it is itself the larger narrative of which all other true narratives are parts. And so do not, when reading Scripture, try to figure out how what you are reading fits some larger story, for there is no larger story.”⁷ The compelling benefits of equipping students with a working comprehension of the whole Bible are many. A few of the more prominent ones will suffice for this occasion.

First, it allows for the whole story of the Bible and all of the grand themes of the Scriptures to be understood. Second, individual passages within a book will make more sense when one understands the context of the whole book, thus reducing the tendency to misinterpret a text by taking it out of context. Third, it demonstrates a response of faith in the truth that

5. Alister McGrath, *Evangelism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 59.

6. *Ibid.*, 63.

7. Robert Jensen, “Scripture’s Authority in the Church” in *The Art of Reading Scripture*, ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 34.

every passage is inspired by God (πᾶσα γραφὴ θεόπνευστος) and therefore profitable (ὠφέλιμος) for life change and the preparation for ministries of good works (2 Tim 3:16–17). Fourth, there will be less risk to skip difficult or controversial issues if they are taught or preached at their appropriate juncture within a sermon series or passage sequence. Fifth, it shows allegiance to the statement of Jesus, who said that man should live “on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4). Sixth, handling the whole Bible promotes the continual growth of the expositor for a lifetime of ministry. And seventh, it allows for both biblical and systematic theology to be done with quality and clarity, granting appropriate attention to the whole council of God. As Thomas Long writes, “Preachers need to give congregations their Bibles back, to rebuild their theological vocabulary, one brick, one word, one concept, one text at a time.”⁸

Theological in Foundation

If the Bible is foundational to theology, and theology is foundational to effective ministry, then a good theological education must demonstrate its commitment to the “faith once delivered” and be able to articulate that biblical faith to the contemporary setting. John Hannah contends that “theology is a call to the church to return to God and make him the center of its priorities and life.”⁹ The kind of commitment that should shape theological education should be framed by an orthodox view of Scripture and a Christ-centered trinitarian faith as derived from the Bible and summarized by the historical councils of the church. Michael Svigel has recently advanced an approach along these lines, locating an evangelical understanding of theology in historic Christian orthodoxy. For him orthodoxy reflects those “tried and true interpretations of the Bible’s major themes, its overarching story, and its fundamental truths.”¹⁰ He organizes what he considers to be the core three terms: the *center*, the *story*, and the *markers*.

The Center: Orthodoxy continuously points us to the person and work of Jesus Christ in his first and second coming

8. Thomas G. Long, “The Witness of Preaching,” *Ministry* 74, no. 7 (July 2001): 9.

9. John Hannah, “The Place of Theology in the Postmodern World: Is the Study of Theology and History an Antiquated Discipline?” *Reformation and Revival* 11, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 13.

10. Michael J. Svigel, *Retro-Christianity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 88.

as the central theme of the Bible, theology, the Christian life, and all reality.

The Story: Orthodoxy reminds us of the overarching biblical narrative of creation, redemption, and ultimate restoration effected by the harmonious work of the triune God: *from* the Father, *through* the Son, and *by* the Holy Spirit.

The Markers: Orthodoxy provides specific and memorable markers that help determine when our doctrine is out of bounds while providing a fenced field in which the Christian can think and act (emphasis in the original).¹¹

For Svigel the content of orthodoxy includes seven basic doctrines derived from Scripture and clarified through the church councils. They include: (1) the doctrine of God: the triune God as Creator and Redeemer; (2) humanity and sin: the fall and resulting depravity; (3) the gospel of God the Son: the person and work of Christ; (4) the doctrine of salvation: salvation by grace through faith; (5) the Bible: inspiration and authority; (6) the church: redeemed humanity incorporated into Christ; and (7) the future: the restoration of humanity and creation.¹² Theology that is faithful to the historic Christian faith should be trinitarian framed, Christ centered, and doxologically focused.

Trinitarian Framed

The doctrine of the Trinity is at the heart of the Christian faith. As Timothy George writes, “The doctrine of the Trinity belongs to the pattern of Christian truth because without it we cannot really understand the narrative of Jesus as the story of God, and if the story of Jesus is anything other than the story of God, there is no Gospel. The doctrine of the Trinity is necessary for understanding the Bible’s overarching account of what God has said and done in history.”¹³ Likewise David Dockery writes, “Thus a thoughtful Christian will focus on the Trinitarian shape of the Christian faith: (1) in

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 98–105. See Alister McGrath for a list of six distinctives to evangelicalism in *Evangelism and the Future of Christianity*, 55–56. Leith Anderson and Ed Stetzer summarized four distinguishing tenants as a set of markers for contemporary evangelicalism in “Defining Evangelicals in an Election Year” in *Christianity Today* 60, no. 3 (2016): 52, accessed February 22, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/april/defining-evangelicals-in-election-year.html>.

13. Timothy George, “The Pattern of Christian Truth,” *First Things* 154 (June/July 2005): 23.

the initiative of the creator God *revealing* Himself; (2) in the love of Christ in *redeeming* us from our sins; and (3) in the Holy Spirit in *regenerating* us and facilitating every aspect of thinking and living Christianly” (emphasis in original).¹⁴

Three great ecumenical creeds—the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed—are structured around the relationship of “God in three Persons,” underlying the essential importance of trinitarian theology. Rowan Williams advances: “Trinitarian theology, in so far as it is concerned with what ‘kind’ of God Christians worship, is far from being a luxury indulged in solely by remote and ineffectual dons; it is of cardinal importance for spirituality and liturgy, for ethics, for the whole of Christian self-understanding.”¹⁵ An informed understanding of the Trinity rooted in the biblical texts and articulated in the historic creeds of the church is an indispensable frame of reference for a theology that is distinctly Christian.

Christ Centered

The central doctrines of the Christian faith concern the person and work of Jesus Christ, the core essence of the gospel. Without Jesus Christ there is no gospel and no Christian faith. Alister McGrath affirms, “Scripture is, for evangelicals, the central legitimizing resource of Christian faith and theology, the clearest window through which the face of Christ may be seen.”¹⁶ Jesus is indeed the center of the Scriptures. As Revelation 19:10 concludes, “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” Thomas Oden explains the necessity of connecting the historical Christ with contemporary ministry. “If ministry cannot be clearly established as the continuation of Jesus’s own intentions and practice, we lose its central theological premise.”¹⁷ The promise by Jesus of his accompanying presence continues to sustain, nourish, and direct present ministry. His pattern of servanthood continues to set a model and tone for leadership and ministry for the body of Christ.

14. David S. Dockery, “Introduction—Faith and Learning: Foundational Commitments” in *Faith and Learning: A Handbook of Christian Higher Education*, ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 9–10.

15. Rowan Williams, *Wrestling with Angels: Conversations in Modern Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 142.

16. McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity*, 61.

17. Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials for Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 59–60.

Not only central to the gospel and Christian ministry, Jesus is central to the whole biblical narrative. Along this angle John Stackhouse Jr. writes, “The person and work of Christ do not merely crown God’s work of revelation and redemption as a sort of splendid ornament or even as the best example of God’s activity in the world. The person and work of Christ constitute the defining chapter of the whole narrative, the hinge of history, the basis upon which everything else in creation makes sense.”¹⁸ Symbolically stated, between creation on the one end and the crown on the other rises the cross of Jesus Christ.

Doxologically Focused

The climax of theological studies should be doxology. All theological study is a means to a greater end, and that end is worship. Ron Allen, in his book *The Wonder of Worship*, writes, “God’s glorious work in redemption of fallen humanity is not an end in itself; it is part of the larger picture of God’s work in eternity, which centers in the display of his transcendent glory.”¹⁹ Nowhere is this more obvious than in the doxologies of the opening of the letter to the Ephesians where each stanza of the trinitarian work of God climaxes with the phrase “bring praise to his glory” or “to the praise of his glory.” John Frame also correlates these twin themes: “Redemption is the means; worship is the goal. In one sense worship is the whole point of everything. It is the purpose of history, the goal of the whole Christian story. Worship is not one segment of the Christian life among others. Worship is the entire Christian life, seen as a priestly offering to God.”²⁰

By *doxology* is meant that the focus of the Christian experience should be to know God better than we know anyone else and to love God more than we love anything or anyone else. *Worship* is more to be defined by subject than style as Gordon Borrer wrote in *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel*: “The lesson which seems to require constant rediscovery is the fact that worship is not primarily a state of art but rather a state of the heart. By state of the heart we mean the driving desire behind the worship

18. John G. Stackhouse Jr., *Evangelical Landscapes: Facing Critical Issues of the Day* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 106.

19. Ronald B. Allen, *The Wonder of Worship* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 21.

20. John Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1996), 11.

life of the believer.”²¹ The focus of all study and service should be directed toward God for his honor and glory!

Spiritual in Its Nature

Tony Sargent states, “The basic, overriding goal of evangelical theological education is spiritual formation with a view to communicating with clarity and power the historic faith.”²² The New Testament is replete with references to the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer. Theological education must always have the spiritual formation of its students as a high priority. Ephesians 3:16–17 records the opening of Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian church: “I pray that he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with power in your inner being through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” The development of the inner life of the student must be a high priority in theological education. “The test of Christian spirituality is conformity of heart and life to the confession and character of Jesus as Lord.”²³ While a host of passages could be marshaled to this point, a few seem appropriately central.

According to Romans 12:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18, the term Paul uses for the renewal and growth of the Christian into Christlike conformity is *transformation*. The word *transformed* is used four times in three contexts in the New Testament. In the Gospels (Matt 17:2; Mark 9:2) the term is used of the transfiguration of Jesus on a mountain in northern Galilee. In the Epistles, Paul uses the term in Romans 12:2 and in 2 Corinthians 3:18 for the catalytic transformational change that is encouraged in the life of the believer. According to Romans 12:2, if people in general and seminary students in particular are going to discover and fulfill the will of God, they must *dedicate* themselves to God, *separate* themselves from the world, and allow the Word of God to effectively *permeate* their lives.

The only other time the word *transform* is mentioned with reference to the believer is in 2 Corinthians 3:18, and that passage specifies the components needed to see a life transformed. Second Corinthians 3:18 reads,

21. Ronald B. Allen and Gordon Borrer, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1982), 23.

22. Tony Sargent, “The Value of Theological Education for Ministry and Service,” address to the Baptist Union Assembly, Scotland, October 24, 2001 (unpublished).

23. T. R. Albin, “Spirituality,” *The New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 657.

“We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.” “We all” speaks of the Christian community whether the local church or even the seminary community. “With unveiled faces” is defined in the context as those who have turned to the Lord through faith in Jesus Christ. The reference to “looking as in a mirror” may be to the Word of God as the place of revelation and reflection where “the glory of the Lord”—the life of Christ—can be seen. The catalytic action, “are being transformed (*μεταμορφόω*) into the same image,” is the miraculous process of life-change into Christlikeness: “the same image.” The growth is characterized as moving in stages “from glory to glory”—literally from (*apo*) glory, into (*eis*) glory. The power behind the transformation is “from the Lord who is the Spirit.” To put it succinctly, a dynamic Christian experience is God’s transformation of the life of the believer into the image of Christ, through the Word of God, by the power of the Spirit of God, in fellowship with the people of God. To borrow from the four-stage metamorphosis that happens in the growth of a butterfly, we can trace what it could look like for a biblically rooted theology to be fleshed out in the theological educational endeavor such as a seminary. Theological education that transforms is a dynamic process of taking students from saving *grace* through healthy *growth* to discovering their *giftedness* to reflecting God’s *glory* in all facets and phases of their lives. What begins with *reconciliation* moves through *renewal* to *reproduction* and culminates in *reflection*.

If spiritual transformation is God’s goal for everyone in the church, then it is the role of the seminary to equip and encourage transformed students to serve in transformed churches that will transform the world for the name and fame of Jesus Christ. *The Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education* advocates, “Our educational programmes must deliberately foster the spiritual formation of the student. We must look for a spiritual development centered in total commitment to the lordship of Christ, progressively worked outward by the power of the Spirit and into every department of life. We must devote as much time and care and structural designing to facilitate this type of growth as we readily and rightly provide for cognitive growth.”²⁴

24. “Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 19, no. 3 (July 1995): 312.

Missional in Vision

Since he is the appreciated editor of this volume, it is only fitting to cite David S. Dockery when he writes, “A distinctive theology for Christian higher education will have Christ as its center, the church as its focus, and the influencing of culture as a key element of its vision.”²⁵ “Missional” is the connectedness of theological education to the evangelistic task in the world. The triangulation of God, the church, and the seminary has been well stated in the Lausanne Movement’s *Cape Town Commitment* of 2011: “The mission of the Church on earth is to serve the mission of God, and the mission of theological education is to strengthen and accompany the mission of the church.”²⁶ Gnana Robinson identifies a two-level purpose for theological education: “[I]n a broader sense it is for preparing the people of God for doing God’s will in this world; and in a narrower sense it is for preparing candidates for doing the ministry of the Church.”²⁷ Accordingly, theological education must stay connected to the church for its validation while staying focused on the world for its vision.

Church Connected

The church is God’s appointed agent for the fulfillment of his purposes in this period of God’s work in history. Therefore, the task of accomplishing theological education is to fulfill the mission of God (*missio Dei*) by equipping the church in its mission to reach the world. The seminary should be a servant to the church. Kristine Stache highlights this partnership in the following statement:

Somewhere in the middle (of all church or all seminary) is a place where institutions and congregations listen to one another. Somewhere in the midst of it all churches well need to rely on the wisdom and vision of academic institutions for pedagogy, curricular outcomes, and processes. Seminaries will need to enter into deep listening with congregations, learning

25. David S. Dockery, “Developing a Theology for Christian Higher Education” in *Renewing Minds* (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 125.

26. Lausanne Movement, *Cape Town Commitment*, part II.VI.4, accessed February 22, 2017, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment>.

27. G. Robinson, *Theological Education in India: The Journey Continues* (Chennai: Christian Literature Society, 2000), 32.

through them and with them to determine the needs and resources of the church at large.²⁸

Too often seminary education can create inflated minds and deflated hearts. Through Peter God called for a balanced growth and development in grace and knowledge (2 Pet 3:18). The benefits the church brings to the seminary include the context in which biblical truth can be applied, the ministry skills developed and deployed, and a protection from being too theoretical and esoteric. The benefits the seminary can bring to the church consist of the richness of theological resources, not the least of which is “to keep the flame of understanding the religious tradition burning.”²⁹ Theological education develops graduates to strengthen the church in order to reach the world through the gospel of Jesus Christ and thereby glorify God.

Globally Focused

The work of missions is the activity of the church throughout the entire world. A relatively new term, *missio Dei*, Latin for “the sending of God,” comprehensively describes “everything God does in relation to the kingdom and everything the church is sent to do.”³⁰ There can be no question the Great Commission to disciple the nations is the heart of the disciples’ mission in the world (Matt 28:19–20). Jesus took the lead to command a worldwide vision with every ethnicity in mind. To stay globally focused, theological educators must partner with ministries of Bible translation, reaching the unreached people groups, and the apologists, all of whom labor seeking a hearing for the gospel of Jesus Christ. On the local level, ties need to be formed to reach the marginalized and the underprivileged as settings for internships and effective mentoring. Such experiences develop the heart and soft skills of ministry so necessary for effective future ministries.

Purposeful in Goal

There is always the perennial danger of mistaking the means for the end. Educational activity is no guarantee for accomplishing ultimate purposes.

28. Kristine Stache, “Formation for the Whole Church: A New/Old Vision of Theological Education in the 21st Century,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 53, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 291.

29. Daniel O. Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 132.

30. A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical and Practical Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 73.

A series of passages come to mind that articulate the end goals (teleology) for theological education—clearly defined goals for both an individual Christian and for the church.

Individual Goals

First, for the individual Paul states the goal (*telos*) of all biblical instruction is love qualified by a transformed life (1 Tim 1:5). This echoes Jesus's response to the challenge of the Pharisees as to which law was most prominent. The love Jesus intends is an unsegmented love for God and a self-sacrificing love for others. Paul, however, qualifies the kind of love God intends. Love for God and others should flow from a life of purity, integrity, and sincerity. To Timothy, Paul writes, "Now the goal of our instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith" (1 Tim 1:5). Purity is the result of a cleansed heart. Integrity is the overall description of life that stems from a good conscience. Sincerity reflects a faith that is both objective and subjective. Objectively, faith is the body of truth to believe; subjectively, it is personal belief in that body of truth. Both are to be held without hypocrisy (the literal meaning of *sincere* in this passage). As it relates to the task of theological education, Parker Palmer rightly asks, "How can the places where we learn to know become the places where we also learn to love?"³¹

Second, Colossians 1:28–29 state, "We proclaim him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. I labor for this, striving with his strength that works powerfully in me." Hence, the spiritual maturity of everyone in the church is the goal of the ministry. In Galatians 4:19 Paul specifies such maturity is really Christlikeness: "My children, I am again suffering labor pains for you until Christ is formed in you." Theological education must be more about the transformation of the student than the mere transference of the subject matter.

Corporate Goals

The difference between the means and the ends for the church is also identifiable in such passages as Ephesians 4:10–13. The means are the gifted

31. Parker Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 9.

people God has given as gifts to the church, and the ends relate to the spiritual health and ministries of the saints. Theological education should remain focused on effective ministry as the evidence of successful equipping. And that ministry will be successful if, and only if, it results in the interpersonal unity, intrapersonal maturity, and doctrinal purity of the church. With the teaching, preaching, counseling, and all that is entailed in church leadership, of utmost importance are the matters of life-change objectives for both the individual and the church as a whole. In the educational environment of outcome assessments theological educators must never forget the biblically defined ends God expects and will no doubt one day assess for success.

Contemporary Challenges

Mary Hess states the current challenge of theological education well when she writes, “Absent any imagination, the work of many theological educators has become an ever more shrill and anxious attempt to transfer the rich content of our disciplinary fields into the increasingly distracted heads of an ever more diverse student body.”³² The distractions that accompany educating theological students today are myriad. Daniel O. Aleshire, in his role as executive director of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), has often spoken to that community about the changes taking place in the church and the changes taking place in the academy. His book, *Earthen Vessels*, is a masterful case for theological schools even in the midst of those changes. He states the current challenge for theological schools is to “articulate a sufficiently compelling reason to invite a new generation of board members, contributors, students, and faculty to sustain and improve these schools and take them into the future that they are called to serve.”³³ Since his work was published, unprecedented cultural convulsions and moral land mines have only exacerbated the situation facing seminaries and theological graduate schools.

32. Mary Hess, “Learning Amidst Transforming Traditions,” *Theological Education* 49, no. 1 (2014): 10.

33. Daniel O. Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels*, 6.

Changing Face of American Christianity

The loss of denominational identities and the devaluation of doctrine have created a new challenge for theological educators. Douglas Jacobson notes, “In the United States, . . . conservative congregations pulling out of mainline denominations are part of a broader issue relating to the loss of denominational identity and coherence generally. Both liberal and conservative denominations across the board don’t have the kind of loyalty or connectiveness with their congregations that they had 20 or 30 years ago.”³⁴ This is evidenced by the renaming of existing churches and the planting of “community” churches, even if those congregations identify privately with a particular denomination or movement. The loss of theological identity also reflects increasing levels of biblical illiteracy.

Shifts in Global Christianity

While it may appear at times that Christianity is grasping for air in America, response to the gospel witness seems to be flourishing in other centers of the world. For some time researchers have chronicled the continuing shift of the Christian epicenter from the West to the “global South” of Africa, Asia, and Central and Latin America.³⁵ The mission of Christianity can no longer be characterized as the “West for the Rest.” In fact, the consensus is that the models of westernized theological training are inadequate for the majority world. Graham Cheesman points out that “Two Thirds of the world Christians are radically rethinking the structure and context of theological education as they have received it at the hands of the missionary enterprise.”³⁶ The resulting challenge is the need to avoid both compromise due to contextualization and the importing of the worst of westernized and commercialized Christianity.

34. “Are People Losing Denominational Identity?” Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans, accessed May 19, 2016, <https://fca.wordpress.com/2011/08/07/are-people-losing-denominational-identity>.

35. See especially Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Miriam Adeney, *Kingdom Without Borders: The Untold Story of Global Christianity* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2009). See also Wes Granberg-Michaelson, “Think Christianity Is Dying? No, Christianity Is Shifting Dramatically,” *Washington Post*, May 20, 2015, accessed May 19, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/05/20/think-christianity-is-dying-no-christianity-is-shifting-dramatically>.

36. Graham Cheesman, “Competing Paradigms in Theological Education Today,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 17, no. 4 (October 1993): 484.

The Rise of Niche Ministries

Forty years ago seminaries trained mostly men for ministries as pastors, Christian education directors, or foreign missionaries. Such traditional roles are no longer standard fare. Most schools have multiple degrees and various tracks with niche ministries for both men and women. This has been balanced with the declining interest in professional ministry and the recent phenomenon of the rise of professionals who want biblical and theological training to equip them for the church and community opportunities of leadership.

Cultural Pluralism and Secularism

America has become the playground of the new tolerance, which in reality is a tolerance for anything but the exclusive message of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Christian faith. The relativizing of opinion to individual preference and the loss of an external objective standard for truth and morality have paved the pathway for both secularism and pluralism. Ironically, while both are politically correct, they are mutually contradictory.

Along with an increased interest in spirituality is a declining interest in Christianity. The increase of the “nones” is reflective of the trend. This term refers “to people who self-identify as atheists or agnostics, as well as those who say their religion is ‘nothing in particular’—[it now makes] up roughly 23 percent of the U.S. adult population. This is a stark increase from 2007, the last time a similar Pew Research study was conducted, when 16 percent of Americans were ‘nones.’”³⁷ In addition, one cannot help but notice the aggressive migration of Islam. What was once geographically confined to the East has now come to the countries and cities of the West.

J. I. Packer verbalizes the difficult environment for doing theological education today: “Thus whole post-Christianity shouts loud, syncretism rides high, calling on us to affirm a transcendental unity of religions in some form and to mute our witness to the Trinity, the incarnation, the atonement, the resurrection, the reign and future return of the Lord Jesus

37. Michael Lipka, “A Closer Look at America’s Rapidly Growing Religious ‘Nones,’” Pew Research Center, May 13, 2015, accessed February 22, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/13/a-closer-look-at-americas-rapidly-growing-religious-nones>.

Christ—in other words, to eliminate the Christian essentials altogether.”³⁸ Further he writes, “The ideal of Christian education for which we stand is being left high and dry in the secular build-up of our self-styled post-Christian world, with its worship of technique, its vacuum of values, and its materialism and pessimism lurking just below the surface.”³⁹

Shifting Student Demographics

With the advent of distance education, alternative scheduling, and online distribution, the average age of the seminary student is increasing. In addition, many imbedded staff members already serving in ministry are enrolling in theological studies. More and more opportunities for women in ministry positions have changed the demographics of most seminaries as well. The perception of a traditional seminary of predominately young male college graduates is no longer the reality.

Paralysis of Student Debt

Challenges for the contemporary seminary student revolve around the issues of time, place, and cost. The issue of time is the difficulty of the *availability* of classes for students seeking to balance their obligations of school, jobs, church, and family. The question of place is that of *accessibility*. Residency requirements are of necessity changing from a definition of location to that of professor-student interaction. Classes can be taken on campus, at extension sites, or online. Many times it is a hybrid of two or three. Cost reflects the challenge of *affordability*. Both the cost of the education and the baggage of college debt are major obstacles to matriculation and graduation from seminary.⁴⁰ The fact that the government will lend a student an unlimited amount for life expenses even beyond tuition and fees encourages even more indebtedness. Without counsel and realistic

38. J. I. Packer, “Kingdom Education: Today’s Task,” in *Thinking Christianly: Christian Higher Education and a Vigorous Life of the Mind*, Paul R. Corts, ed. (Birmingham, AL: Sherman Oaks Books, 2011), 215.

39. *Ibid.*, 224.

40. “National data from the Center for the Study of Theological Education at Auburn Theological Seminary indicates both the number of students entering seminary with debt and the amounts they have to pay back upon entering the workforce are increasing substantially. ‘It is no longer unusual for seminary graduates to leave school with \$70,000 to \$80,000 in debt,’ says Sharon Miller, associate director of the center.” David Briggs, “The High Cost of Service: Student Debt Burdens Religious Workers,” Association of Religious Data Archives, accessed February 22, 2017, <http://blogs.thearda.com/trend/featured/the-high-cost-of-service-student-debt-burdens-religious-workers>.

planning for the future, many seminary graduates could find themselves unable to assume ministry positions with modest remuneration or achieve appointment to the mission field.

Explosion of Technology

Technology has been a game changer for education in general and theological education in particular. There are four aspects to consider. The *upside* of technology is increased capabilities of access and organization of content. The *downside* is the increasing cost to stay current. The *flipside* is the changes technology has meant for how one learns, teaches, and worships in the contemporary ministry settings. The *outside* is the challenge and opportunities technology affords for accessibility and distribution of theological education both nationally and globally.

Economic Uncertainty

International economic uncertainty has everyone nervous and creates a hesitancy for many to take risks. Seven years after the financial crisis of 2008 and 2009, recovery is still weak in most parts of the global economy. Global debt has grown by \$57 trillion, raising the ratio of debt to GDP by 17 percentage points.⁴¹ Donor bases for most ministries are older and shrinking as they pass away. Added to this is the rising cost of tuition required from students as denominational support and government funding become more and more scarce. The challenge will be to cultivate a new generation of donors from those for whom charitable giving has not necessarily been a strong suit.

Conclusion

Vernon Davis insightfully states, “The call in academia is for freedom; the cry in the church is for faith. At stake for new ventures in theological education is whether the process of education in the academy can demonstrate outcomes that are consonant with their confessional foundations.”⁴² In the steeplechase of the culture with its increasing hurdles and deepening water hazards, the task of theological education can be daunting to many and

41. Uuriintuya Batsaikhan and Pia Hüttel, “The Global Debt Overhang,” (blog), *Bruegel*, October 26, 2015, accessed May 19, 2016, <http://bruegel.org/2015/10/the-global-debt-overhang>.

42. Vernon Davis, “The Unsettled Landscape of Theological Education,” *Review and Expositor* 95 (1998): 2.

downright off-putting to others. However, we remember that if Christianity, by God's design, could be birthed and flourish in the first century with all its political tyranny, we have every reason to work with a tenacious conviction to biblical truth, a compassion shaped by God's grace, and a courage forged from a faith in the One who is both the designer of all reality and the definer of all that has meaning.

Questions for Further Reflection

1. What are the primary purposes for theological education?
2. What are the essential components of an evangelical theology?
3. In light of the history of theological drift in schools originally founded to train ministers, how can a school help protect doctrinal fidelity for future generations?
4. What does it mean for a school to be Christ centered in its mission and curriculum?
5. What are some practical ways to keep doxology as the rightful end of theology?
6. In what ways should the church and the seminary be mutually supportive and mutually dependent?
7. What are the most challenging trends in the culture or the church that threaten the survival of graduate theological education?

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