

Formational Theological Education and Its Goals

For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.

—*Titus 1:7-9*

Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way—for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.

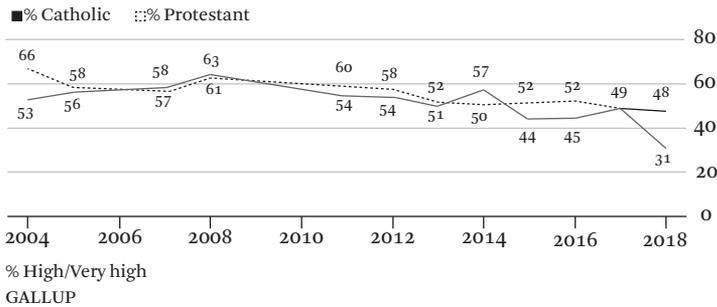
—*1 Timothy 3:2-7*

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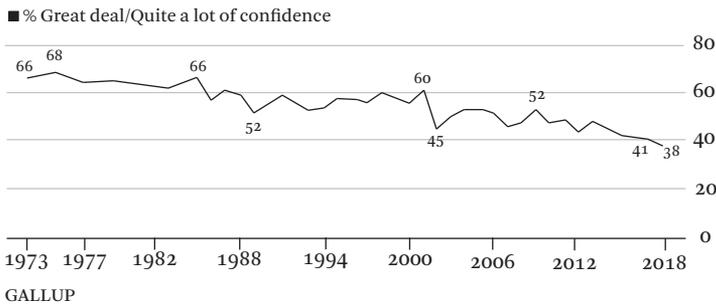
This chapter opens with two texts. The two texts have their problems—the relationship of contemporary religious leadership to the elders or bishops who oversaw fledgling house churches in the first century, the use of these texts to assert male-dominated religious leadership, the culturally removed counsel about marriage and keeping children submissive. But the texts remain instructive about characteristics fundamentally important for persons who would lead communities of faith—“temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money”—

Positive Views of the Honesty and Ethical Standards of Clergy, by Religion

Please tell me how you would rate the honesty and ethical standards of people in these different fields—very high, high, average, low, or very low? How about clergy?



Americans' Confidence in “the Church or Organized Religion”



the kinds of qualities that are not bound by time or culture. Now compare these two texts to the two charts on p. 76. The charts have their problems—the validity of answers that people give to callers over the phone, the reductionism of forcing perceptions about reality into categorical response possibilities. But the data over time do paint a picture of a declining positive view of the ethics of clergy (a drop of more than 20 percentage points in the past fifteen years) and declining confidence in organized religion (a drop of almost 30 percentage points from 1975 to 2018). These data are the product of sophisticated polling strategies, and even after accounting for margins of error, the decline in these polls remains striking. Is there any chance these texts and charts have something to say about the next theological education? This chapter addresses that question by reflecting on theological education in the current cultural moment. I argue for a mode of theological education that stresses *formation* and try to assess that goal in relation to the factors that have been so important for theological education throughout its history: the church, the wider culture, and higher education.

Theological Education and the Current Cultural and Religious Moment

In the era of colonies and early nationhood, the education of ministers was not distinct from the education of civic leaders, and educated clergy sometimes served in both roles. In the modern age of the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, with the growth of urban industrial centers and many congregations, theological education upped its educational standards. By the mid-twentieth century, theological education took the form of professional education with its focus on skills as well as specialized biblical and theological knowledge. Throughout this long period, religion enjoyed a privileged place in the culture and religious participation was generally high.

For the past several decades, however, the social location of religion has been changing, and the data in the Gallup charts above re-

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flect that change. Many reasons undergird this decline in the social influence and cultural esteem of religion, in addition to the moral and legal failures of religious leaders that have grabbed headlines. While a certain kind of religion has been publicly present, evident in recent elections, researcher Robert Jones has shown that it is beginning to abate and will likely continue to shrink in the coming decades because of demographic changes. According to reliable data from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, the percentage of Americans attending services of worship has been declining. The fastest-growing religious identification in the United States has been “no religious affiliation” (more than 20 percent of the US population), and for several generations the religious participation of generational cohorts has declined. While religious participation in the United States remains higher than that in any other liberal democracy, the changes afoot are neither transitory nor ephemeral. These shifts constitute the cultural context in which to discern the future of theological education.¹

Theological education has changed and continues to change, but it changes slowly, as I have already noted, and it tends to change by accrual rather than by replacement. Theological schools keep much of what they have always been doing while they add options. Over time, they shed some but not all of the old, and they lean into the new, but not all at once. They do not change by replacement, but they do change. In the past decades, *how* the schools taught was changing, and for Protestant schools, *where* they taught was changing as well as *when* students could study. But, for the most part, *what* the schools have been teaching has remained quite stable. It was a curriculum that emerged in the nineteenth century and matured in the twentieth century into the model of professional theological education that exists today. This curriculum and educational model developed during an era of strong religious institutions and robust denominational structures. What should be the pattern of the theological education when these realities are no longer present?

I argued in the first chapter that theological education seems to be between the times. Perhaps that has always been the case.

The education of priests and ministers has always existed, from ancient New Testament qualifications for ministry to current religious practices and structures. If it is always at least somewhat between the times, then theological education never gets it “right” for more than a season. What is good at one time—responding effectively to a fixed scriptural point and a transitory cultural moment—can be bad for another time. I think the current cultural moment calls for renewed attention to the enduring qualities enumerated in the above Scriptures: being not violent but gentle, a lover not of money but of goodness, not quarrelsome but prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. As religion is increasingly on the defensive and many religious institutions are in decline, an invaluable response will be to ensure the fundamental Christian character of Christian leaders. That emphasis on character will require the next theological education to assume more responsibility for cultivating these qualities in ministerial candidates. This effort will change parts of the curriculum and some of the strategies related to teaching and learning. Language of “parts” and “some” might not grab attention in our cultural moment. This is a time that relishes overwhelming change and is fascinated by the one event that can purportedly change everything, even though that is seldom the way things actually work. Changes to “parts” and “some,” however, can precipitate a surprising transformation.

The name I propose for the “next” theological education is “formational.” The 1996–2018 accrediting standards of the Commission on Accrediting of the ATS use “formation” in at least two ways. The introduction to the standard on curriculum, for example, states that “A theological school is a community of faith and learning that cultivates habits of theological reflection, nurtures wise and skilled ministerial practice, and contributes to the formation of spiritual awareness and moral sensitivity.”² In this usage, “formation” is limited to spiritual awareness and moral sensitivity. The standard continues that “the curriculum should be seen as a set of practices with a *formative* aim—the development of intellectual, spiritual, moral, and vocational or

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professional capacities—and careful attention must be given to the coherence and mutual enhancement of its various elements” (emphasis added). In this usage, “formative” applies to the curriculum as a whole, not just to spiritual awareness and moral maturity. My proposal for formational theological education will include these elements, along with others, and give particular attention to the process of theological education.

Roman Catholic schools use “formation” as the primary name for education that prepares candidates for the sacrament of ordination. Not sharing this sacramental understanding of ordination, most Protestants have been leery of the term. Roman Catholics have also been comfortable with the implication that “formation” suggests a specific outcome of a process; Protestants also object to the notion of a prescribed outcome. Even with these hesitations, in recent years different groups of Protestants have begun to talk of formation more frequently.

William Sullivan called this emphasis on formation a distinctive feature of theological education. Sullivan, then at the Carnegie Foundation, oversaw a series of studies on education for the professions, including clergy, engineers, lawyers, physicians, nurses, and others. He notes that at the center of the pedagogy for the education of clergy is “the idea of formation: the recognition that teaching and learning are about much more than transferring cognitive facts or even cognitive tools. Learning in the formative sense is a process by which the student becomes a certain kind of thinking, feeling, and acting being.” Sullivan continues: “Although seminaries have not escaped the power of the technical model of professionalism, the intellectual core of their teaching has been a concern with the significance and practical implications of the interpretation of texts, customary practices, and experience. The focus of which has kept the idea of formative education alive.”³ With dynamics like these in mind, I use “formation” as a name both for a particular kind of goal for theological education *and* for the educational processes that goal requires.

I think that the present cultural moment is calling theological educators to make explicit what has been assumed, to accept responsibilities for areas that have been minimized in theological

education, and to expand its focus to the wide range of characteristics that will give ministry the authenticity it needs in this culture at this time.

The Goal of Formational Theological Education

The place to begin exploring the goal of formational theological education is in the tradition of Christian thought. Edward Farley noted that, in the Middle Ages, theological study was understood to result in a *habitus*, “a cognitive disposition and orientation of the soul, a knowledge of God and what God reveals,”⁴ which reflects an Aristotelian concept of knowing as an “orientation of the soul.” Theologian David Kelsey has argued that the aim of contemporary theological education should be to understand God truly, and that the theological concept of “wisdom” is one of the ways in which Christians “understand.” He goes on to note, however, that “wisdom obscures important differences” that include “contemplation, discursive reasoning, affections, and actions that comprise a Christian life.”⁵ The goal of theological education should begin with careful attention to these two observations. Such education should be about a *habitus*, an orientation of the soul, and should understand that a wisdom of God and the things of God is a kind of understanding that embraces many ways in which an individual comes to know God, such as contemplation, rational discourse, and actions.

Theological education found its way to the colleges in the American colonies as the study of divinity. Farley noted that divinity as studied in early America was “not just an objective science but a personal knowledge of God and the things of God in the context of salvation.” It “was an exercise of piety, a dimension of the life of faith.”⁶ The study of divinity was required of all students in those schools, not just students studying for ministry, but as education for ministry separated from general higher education, the “study of divinity” fell into disuse.

What goal would attend to *habitus*, to Christian understanding with its many characteristics, to the concept of the study of divinity that intermingled Christian commitment and knowledge,

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and to the formational educational practices that theological education brought to its version of professional education? The goal that I propose attends to these but with significant additions. Farley's and Kelsey's descriptions are broad, but they focus on the cognitive and intellectual, with some leaning toward the affective. I want to increase the affective elements and include stress on a range of behavioral elements, including those that constitute the practices of ministerial leadership. Farley argued that one of the problems with theological education (by which I think that he meant the professional model) is that it has become too clerical in orientation. My proposal assumes that the practices of clerical ministry are themselves formative; they are a way in which pastors and priests come to an orientation of the soul. As a result, I propose a goal that assumes that cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements are all important, perhaps equally important.

The goal of theological education should be the development of *a wisdom of God and the ways of God, fashioned from intellectual, affective, and behavioral understanding and evidenced by spiritual and moral maturity, relational integrity, knowledge of the Scripture and tradition, and the capacity to exercise religious leadership*. This definition is an awkward and technical effort to get at something that is far more ineffable. The awkward and technical aspects can be elaborated while the ineffable aspects can only be respected and affirmed.

Wisdom of God and Ways of God

Wisdom refers not to an accumulation of knowledge or capacity for good judgment but to longing for or love of God, a participation in divine life through the ongoing promptings of the Spirit. While this is an essential part of Christian life for any believer, it takes on special importance for one who serves in ministry. The past decades of theological education have rightly and consistently made the point that a minister is not necessarily someone who is more spiritual than other Christians, and certainly cannot be "more" Christian on behalf of people who are "less" Christian.

While this emphasis humanized religious leadership, it may also have undervalued how important ministers' love for God is—both for their own spiritual lives and for their authenticity as religious leaders. It is as wrong for people in the pews to assume that their pastor loves God on their behalf as it is for a pastor to assume that his or her love of God is irrelevant to authority to serve as a leader. The love of God is experienced or expressed in many ways. It is “traditioned”—it takes different forms and expressions in different communities of faith. The wisdom of God that a Pentecostal minister experiences and expresses will be different from that of a Roman Catholic priest, but neither can be an authentic leader without a wisdom—without loving and longing for God. This longing is not a guarantee that dark nights of the soul or periods of doubt will not occur; indeed, it is frequently their cause. Loving and longing are about aspiration more than achievement, about maturing more than maturity.

Wisdom in the ways of God comes through relationship, not just from information. It is, for example, by loving a spouse over many years that one becomes wise about a spouse's ways with sadness and joy, about what the spouse most cherishes and hopes for, about how the spouse forgives and makes it through dark moments. In a similar way, wisdom of the ways of God grows out of having longed for and loved God. The spousal example fails in a significant way because spousal wisdom is personal. Wisdom of the ways of God is communal. It reflects an accrual across the centuries and cultures in which people have loved God and shared some account of their love. Any one individual's perception is inadequate, even vacuous, absent the wisdom of the community. The communal nature of wisdom of the ways of God is one reason that learning is central to Christian life and authentic ministry.

*Fashioned from Intellectual, Affective,
and Behavioral Understanding*

To the extent that the wisdom of God and the ways of God are learned, it is a learning fashioned from intellectual, affective,

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and behavioral patterns of knowing. While each is different, each informs and contributes to the others. I may be moved by a hymn tune, for example, but moved even more when the text to that tune fits it aesthetically and intellectually. In this case, the intellectual (text) adds meaning to the affective or emotive (tune). I may know a passage of Scripture well, understand it, but then hear it set to music. When the beauty of the music explicates the meaning of the text, the result is new understanding. Most people who attended Sunday school as young children learned songs that were often accompanied by physical motions. Some of these songs linger in memory long after childhood because they combined intellectual ways of knowing (learning the words) with behavioral ways of knowing (making the motions), and, because the songs were fun for children to sing, they involved affective ways of knowing, as well. These illustrations would be misleading if interpreted to say that cognitive, affective, and behavioral modes are only means of learning. They are not. They are about something more. They are about “understanding,” in Kelsey’s terms. Each pattern of learning contributes to a form of understanding, and none is superior to the others.

Intellectual understanding is ubiquitous in theological education. A large share of the effort of theological learning is devoted to intellectual effort—books are read, papers are written, discussions are engaged in, languages are learned—that constitutes the center of current practices of theological education. Eleventh-century theologian Anselm famously expressed what he understood as a paraphrase of Augustine, that theology is “faith seeking understanding.” Few introductory theology classes conclude without some mention of this enduring definition. How the character and ways of God are understood influences how the Christian faith is constructed and perpetuated. Ideas matter.

Decades ago, my daughter and I were walking home from her preschool. The weekend before, the youth and children of our congregation had performed Benjamin Britten’s *Noe’s Fludde*. Our daughter had been captivated by the story, the music, and the children dressed as animals. Somehow our conversation

turned to that production and the story of Noah and the flood. I asked her about it. She explained that people had been bad, and God got angry and caused a flood that killed the people. I was taken aback. Her idea about the flood was somewhat right but altogether wrong. The story is about justice and judgment, but it is not about a God who throws a temper tantrum. Justice is an intrinsic part of divine love, and if she thought that God was a God of anger, her nascent faith would have little chance of maturing to embrace a God whose ways are love and justice, mercy and grace. Intellectual understanding is at the “heart” of Christian faith.

If intellectual understanding is at the heart of Christian faith, there must be an understanding of the heart—an affective understanding. If Anselm’s motto is the most used for understanding the intellectual work of theology, then Pascal’s must be the most-used statement about affective understanding: “The heart has its own reason which Reason does not know; a thousand things declare it.”⁷ The writer of 1 John is rather passionate about the importance of the affective in Christian life: “Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:7–8). Love is a way of *knowing* God; love provides an understanding of God that is not possible in other ways. The text makes the interesting point that we grasp love’s understanding of God not in mystical meditation but in the act of loving others. The human ability to love is a gift of God, and as God’s gift, it reflects part of God’s own identity. When people love one another, they discover in themselves something of the character of God—they experience a replica of God’s most central characteristic, and the result is a kind of understanding about the ways of God that could be achieved by no other means.

Learning the ways of God also engages human behavior. When a surgeon performs a complex procedure on an open body, or an adult rides a bicycle for the first time since childhood, or I strike the keys on the computer keyboard writing these words, the memory seems to be in the muscles—the behavioral

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element of the actions. The memory is actually in the brain, of course, but a different kind of memory is involved in behaviors than the kind that remembers facts. Behavior can provide its own form of understanding. A congregation sponsors a mission trip, for example, and the youth travel to an area that has been damaged by a flood or tornado. For a week, they clean, carry debris, or make minor repairs to buildings. They come back to their congregation and report how they see their faith differently. In worship, most people bow their heads for prayer and some lift upturned hands in supplication during the Lord's Prayer. People kneel in worship in some Christian traditions while in others they lift their hands in praise. While these religious behaviors vary by Christian tradition, most traditions engage particular behaviors in acts of worship or service. My hunch is that religious communities have learned these ritual behaviors because what people believe is tutored by what they do: behavior brings a form of understanding that is different from intellectual or affective ways of understanding.

The *wisdom of God and the ways of God*—this longing for and loving of God, this understanding that accrues from the centuries and cultures that people have longed for God—are *fashioned from intellectual, affective, and behavioral understanding*—these very different ways of comprehending, leaning into, and learning. The goal of theological education, however, is not the joy of knowing God and the things of God, satisfying as that may be, but *spiritual and moral maturity, relational integrity, knowledge of the Scripture and tradition, and the capacity to exercise religious leadership*. Like intellectual, affective, and behavioral understanding, these are integrated and interactive qualities that inform one another and contribute to a whole that differs from the sum of the parts.

Spiritual and Moral Maturity

A paragraph is a poor vehicle to convey centuries of thought about the nature of Christian spirituality and the fabric of moral maturity. Some images point to these long traditions, but they

are not those traditions. Some faculty members at a seminary where I taught for twelve years tried to define Christian spirituality and concluded that it “involves transforming responsiveness of the whole person individually and corporately to God, the ‘Beyond in our midst,’ and participation in God’s continuing creation and redemption in and through Jesus Christ.”⁸ This is certainly not a better definition than a hundred others, but it is sufficient for consideration at this juncture. Spiritual maturity emerges from a three-way intersection where the human longing for God meets the mystery of God and the work of God in human lives. The ways people love God are traditioned, and the way spirituality is experienced varies by tradition. Mature spirituality is different for a Quaker who regularly participates in an unprogrammed meeting than for an Episcopalian who regularly attends service with music, homily, and Eucharist. While there are common elements—the responsiveness to God and participation in the things of God—those elements can be experienced and expressed differently.

Definitions of moral maturity are no less abundant than definitions of Christian spirituality, and often vary by the psychological, philosophical, or theological perspectives on which they are based. Whatever else, moral maturity includes a theologically informed understanding of right and wrong, the intellectual capacity to discern moral issues in human and community contexts, and the ability to behave in ways that are consistent with the determination of what is right and what is wrong. The decline in confidence in the ethics of clergy in the Gallup data that introduced this chapter appears to be related to the public moral failure of clergy through sexual misconduct, the sexual abuse of children, the use of power to obtain sexual attention, and the theft or misuse of charitable funds. It is likely that these clergy knew right from wrong but failed to act rightly in the context of their knowledge. Other times, knowing the right thing to do can be more subtle and nuanced, and failure to do the right thing is in part a failure to understand what the right thing is. Doing the right thing also can be difficult because, once the right thing is discerned, it can be daunting to do. All these difficul-

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ties mean that moral maturity is a goal, something to be learned by working on it. Moral maturity is not easy and does not come as a free gift. In Pauline language, “that I would, I do not, and that I would not, that I do.” Moral maturity is at the heart of the public credibility that makes moral witness possible and undergirds the authority of religious leadership. Moral and spiritual maturity contribute to many of the qualities deemed appropriate for religious leadership in the texts cited from the Pastoral Epistles—qualities like “above reproach,” “not a lover of money,” and “not violent but gentle.”

Relational Integrity

A religious leader can be spiritual and moral and still be relationally immature or inappropriate. Qualities like “temperate,” “sensible,” and “hospitable” are aspects of relational integrity and may or may not result from spiritual or moral maturity. Relational integrity includes taking others seriously and attending to them, treating people with kindness and patience, cultivating the capacity to empathize, attending to how others see the world and interpret its meaning, and exercising relational flexibility. Sometimes a good pastor is described as someone who has a “pastor’s heart,” and that description likely reflects the qualities that I have associated with relational integrity. Leaders who adjudicate difficult pastoral transitions in which the congregation perceives the pastor to have been at fault often cite the pastor’s “difficulty at getting along with people” as a contributing factor to the conflict. Relationships matter. The God of Christians is a relational God, and communities of faith are intrinsically relational. Relational integrity is not about being a nice person or likable, as good as those qualities might be: it is about embodying and enacting a faithful way of being human.

Knowledge of Scripture and Tradition

The Pastoral Epistles also require the leader (the bishop) to “have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching.” Christianity is a content-rich tradition. Its founder

was a first-century rabbi known for his teaching and knowledge of texts. He interpreted the law in a way that cut to its underlying principles and made of a mustard seed and olive tree lessons of deeper religious truth. In an era of limited literacy, Jesus's first followers wrote books to document his teaching and mighty deeds, and the first major interpreter of the Jesus movement, Paul the apostle, provided intellectually adept guidance for Christianity in its first century and beyond. The early church fathers wrote sermons and works of theology and practical guides for life, and by the fourth century the church had reached consensus about the books that would form the New Testament. The tradition continued; monasteries preserved and reproduced Scripture and other writings, and theological understanding grew. The printing press was invented, and the Bible and theological books became available to an increasingly literate world. The Reformation—the many reformations—brought more books that enlarged the tradition as well as the kinds of persons who could study it. The Enlightenment gave impetus to the reasoned analysis of the accrued and accruing tradition. The tradition has continued to the present moment, rich in every way, expanding its library and deepening its perception of the human condition and the hope of God for the human family and God's world. This text and this tradition—Scripture, theology, history, the languages of the Bible, ethics—provide a rich and varied array of “the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching.” It is incumbent on persons who desire to lead communities of faith or who represent themselves as Christian leaders to know this tradition that has been loved and debated, defined and redefined, interpreted and reinterpreted across cultures and centuries.

The Capacity for Religious Leadership

The Pastoral texts also identify two other ministry skills: the bishop should be an “apt teacher” and “be able . . . to preach with sound doctrine.” Preaching and teaching have been central in the life of the church since its beginning. The arts of minis-

try—the skills that provide the capacity for leadership—are not content-neutral. Good preaching is not just an oratorical event: it is an act of communicating the Christian story (“sound doctrine” in the language of the text). Good teaching is not merely about pedagogical excellence: it is about instructing people in the tradition. The range of ministerial skills has increased over the years, especially in the past century or so, to include leadership and administration, pastoral care and congregational studies, organizational theory and sociology of religion, and others. The list has been growing and likely needs to continue to expand. The issue of cultural and congregational literacy—being able to read a community and congregation or parish—is becoming more crucial to effective leadership. Like teaching and preaching, these areas have a theological core, combine into an overarching field of pastoral theology, and constitute something different from the mere borrowing of knowledge from other domains.

The goal of theological education is a wisdom of God and the ways of God fashioned from intellectual, affective, and behavioral understanding and evidenced by spiritual and moral maturity, relational integrity, knowledge of the Scripture and tradition, and the capacity to exercise religious leadership. Perhaps this aim of theological education should include more, or perhaps stating the aim in these terms is too idealistic. Regardless of its possible problems, it is altogether reasonable to assume that the aim of theological education is directly linked to the qualities that are important for persons who serve as Christian leaders.

Assessing This Goal in Terms of Religion, Culture, and Higher Education

I argued in the second chapter that theological education is influenced by the church, with its tradition and current needs; by higher education, with its changing practices over time; and by cultural moments, with their undulating variations. If these influences are as strong and consistent as I have suggested, then they also provide a basis for assessing the integrity of the goal of theological education.

Does This Goal of Theological Education Serve the Church's Tradition and Current Needs?

Many of the expectations embodied in this goal—particularly those related to spiritual and moral maturity, relational integrity, knowledge of Scripture and tradition, and some of the skills that ministry requires—were first identified in the passages quoted earlier from the Pastoral Epistles. They emerged early in the church's life and continue to be important. While ministry has had and continues to have dark periods in which power, social structures, and human sinfulness prevail, and while ministry has had and continues to have its charlatans who abuse the human longings that prompt people toward faith, these failures, malfeasance, and abuse point to the enduring integrity of these expectations for good and faithful ministry. The church and the gospel it declares are magnified by the presence of these qualities and diminished by their absence.

The adequacy of this goal might also be judged by the current hopes of people of faith—a kind of reader-response assessment. What would the persons who receive the ministerial and priestly efforts think of this goal for the education of the people who bury their parents and baptize their children? Would these qualifications reflect the “holiness” parishioners hope for in a Roman Catholic priest? Would they invite the confidence of a Baptist congregation in its pastor or seem suitable for an executive minister responsible for the area cooperative ministry with its housing and food-support programs? Would a mainline Presbyterian congregation respect a learned clergyperson who embodied these qualities? Would an evangelical megachurch consider these qualities to be winsome in its pastoral leaders? A reader-response evaluation would be inappropriate if all it did was provide a consumer-dictated sense of ministry that may be popular but does not respect the church's long tradition. It might prove appropriate, however, if leadership must be received in order to be effective.

More than four decades ago, I was the junior member of a research team asked to identify characteristics considered important or detrimental to the practice of ministry. The study was con-

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ducted with the assumption that laity, parish clergy, seminary professors, chaplains and counselors, and judicatory officials could legitimately express the church's perception of qualities important for ministers and priests. More than five thousand clergy and laity across the spectrum of denominations represented by ATS member schools in the early 1970s were asked to respond to five hundred statements about ministry.⁹ The survey was readministered to smaller but still substantial populations of laity and clergy fifteen years later, and then another fifteen years after that, with remarkably stable ratings across three decades. In the final analysis, the expectations embodied in the responses could be distilled into three fundamental affirmations: (1) ministers or priests must love God—expressing that love in ways that vary with different traditions' understanding of the ways in which God is loved and evidenced in characteristics such as moral integrity and spiritual sensitivity; (2) priests and ministers must love the people they are called to serve—particularly with evidence of the disciplines of loving others such as respecting them, keeping confidences, being available to serve when the people need them, attending sympathetically to the wounds and brokenness of others; and (3) ministers and priests must be able to do the work of ministry—knowing the texts and tradition and performing the tasks of ministry with dependable skill. If these are legitimate expressions of the church's desire in a more modern moment, then this goal of theological education fits both the long tradition and the current moment.

Does This Proposed Goal Reflect Realities of the Current Cultural Moment?

This is an era of suspicion of many social institutions, but the critique of religion and religious leaders seems especially acute in its fundamental questions about the value of religion and the trustworthiness of religious leaders. A model of theological education focused on the proposed goal would not change the cultural perceptions that are derived from many influences, but

theological education in this American century cannot be faithful without some attention to the publicly declining perception that clergy can be trusted to act ethically and that the church can be trusted as a custodian of the common good. The church and its leaders will not be able to address this cultural perception with still more knowledge, more ministerial skill, or newly conceived approaches to ministry. Addressing it will require emotional maturity, moral integrity, and unimpeachable ethical standards.

Another way current cultural reality speaks to this goal is in the reconsideration of competence and smartness. Edward D. Hess and Katherine Ludwig argue that the “new smart” needed in business and other social arenas redefines being smart as “excelling at the highest level of thinking, learning and emotionally engaging with others that one is capable of doing.”¹⁰ While “thinking” continues to be a part of their definition of “smart,” it is no longer enough in a future when artificial intelligence will be able to do much of what “smart” people have done. The new “smart” must include the ability to continue learning and “emotionally engaging with others,” qualities necessary for collaboration and teamwork. Would it not be interesting if the highest form of human attainment in this century of artificial intelligence were relational and emotional as well as intellectual? What if relational integrity and emotional maturity—qualities that have always counted in ministry—emerge as the qualities most needed for commerce and innovation in the most advanced democracies? If this proves to be the case, part of theological education’s role at this time and in this culture will be to maximize those abilities in candidates for religious leadership.

Does This Proposed Statement Reflect Questions or Issues in Higher Education?

Higher education may pose the hardest test for the integrity of this proposed goal for theological education. I wrote previously that theological education has tended to adopt higher education practices, which certainly was the case from the nineteenth

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through the mid-twentieth century. Theological schools grew out of what we would call liberal arts colleges, and in many ways shared common educational goals to cultivate character and civic consciousness in persons who would serve a common good. Over time, things have both changed and stayed the same. David Kelsey writes about theological education as occurring between Athens and Berlin.¹¹ Athens is the metaphor for *paideia*—a kind of education that nurtures the soul. It is about character, values, and the kind of learning that prepares people for service that contributes to a common good. Berlin is his metaphor for the modern research university, which originated in the founding of the University of Berlin. It was a form of education with Enlightenment energy and a focus on the generation of new knowledge and objective rationality. Early American colleges were “Athens” in their educational goals, as was the theological education they housed. During the nineteenth century, the Berlin pattern of education began influencing American higher education, and theological schools used both models.

The Berlin model gained increasing supremacy in higher education in at least two ways. The first was in the rapid growth of publicly funded institutions. Before the Civil War, higher education in America was primarily in the form of private liberal arts colleges or teaching universities. After the war, many public institutions were founded, and a century later, the vast majority of undergraduates were enrolled in public institutions. The Berlin model was invented for publicly funded higher education in Germany, and it was readily adaptable to the growing number of publicly funded institutions in America. While these schools had the goal of educating for the common good, it became increasingly difficult in the twentieth century for them to educate in *paideia* ways because of the pluralistic character of the American population and the prevailing perspective that most value-laden decisions were private and individual issues rather than common and corporate.

The second way in which Berlin gained ascendancy was in the emergence of the research-intensive university. These universi-

ties—both public and private—understand their commitment to the common good in terms of scientific advancement and generation of new knowledge. Research-intensive universities are a dominant influence in American higher education because they educate a significant number of faculty in all of higher education, are perceived as the leadership institutions, and how they do their work influences how faculty think academic work should be done.

Liberal arts colleges have held on to the educational goals of *paideia*, but the humanities, which were the primary carriers of this goal, have come under increasing suspicion, fueled by the perception that liberal arts education does not prepare graduates for employment upon graduation. To argue that theological education needs to be even more attentive to the educational goals that are clearly aligned with *paideia* education, as I have argued in this chapter, is counter to the dominant pattern of intellectual work in the university.

Learning to love God does not lend itself to the kind of objectivity that is most valued in some forms of higher education. Learning to love God involves substantial intellectual requirements, but objective rationality is not one of them. Rational objectivity requires testing truth claims, and the most truthful claims of Christianity are not readily testable. The focus on the generation of knowledge places high value on discovering something new, and some of the most important tasks of religion are to assert something quite old. This intellectual moment is suspicious of grand narratives, and ultimate grand narrative claims are at the center of religious reality. These binary comparisons wither, of course, as most binary constructions do in a multi-dimensional world, but they illustrate the problem my proposal has if it is to be advanced in current and emerging intellectual tools of higher education.

Research-oriented higher education has the perfect tools for one kind of knowing, but formational theological education requires different tools. The study of religion is a case in point. To have a home in the university, theological education needs to use the academy's intellectual tools, and to use those tools, religious

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studies courses tend to explore the phenomena of religions—tracing their practices and history, identifying similarities and differences among traditions, assessing religions' cultural presence and impact, identifying ways that people of different religions can talk with one another, and so on. These are important and honorable intellectual efforts, but they are not designed to lead a student to love God more or to be more devoted in his or her faith. My point is illustrative and hypothetical, but it remains a point. The goal of formational theological education will require substantial and careful intellectual and educational work, and while that work will use many of the dominant tools of higher education, it will require other tools as well.

The changes that occurred in higher education in the twentieth century have not gone unnoticed or without critique. James Burtchaell asserts that the religious foundations of American colleges and universities have been surrendered to a perception of higher education where objectively neutral rationality dominates.¹² Mark Schwehn has argued that higher education has left the religious foundation in which it largely began, and as a result, suffers from the loss of values that are central to scholarly work.¹³ Critique is not the only effort at this point. An interesting set of essays edited by Douglas Henry and Michael Beaty provides proposals to renew and restore education that claims a goal of moral or character formation.¹⁴ Some liberal arts colleges are working to reestablish their historical *paideia* pattern of education through programs like the Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education, which was “formed to enrich the intellectual and theological exploration of vocation among undergraduate students.”¹⁵ This network of more than 250 predominantly liberal arts colleges uses the word “vocation” to mean different things, but all member schools are using curricular and cocurricular efforts to help students think about meaning and purpose in their lives—educational goals reflecting the *paideia* model. The concern is not just in the liberal arts colleges. In the most recent changes to the requirements for baccalaureate degrees at Harvard, students must complete at least one course in the area of ethics and civics that

“engage[s] with large questions about right and wrong, helping students grapple with the nature of civic virtue and the ethical dimensions of what they say and do.”¹⁶

The proposed goal of formational theological education would be supported from the perspective of the church and its needs at this time and would address worries in the culture about religion and its leaders. It would also have a home in the parts of higher education that attend to civic virtue, meaning and purpose in life, and educating for a common good. It could increasingly become a stranger in the parts of higher education whose absolute commitment is to objectivity, rationality, and the generation of new data. Theological education will continue to have part of its identity in higher education but may need to forge other parts of its identity outside the dominant intellectual and educational practices of the most elite levels of higher education.

*The Formational Goal and Current Educational Practices
in Theological Schools*

Let’s assume that this goal or aim of theological education is appropriate for church, culture, and at least some segments of higher education, and let’s assume that religious leaders who embody the qualities to which this aim is directed would be perceived as competent and trustworthy. Let’s assume that these qualities are faithful to the church’s long tradition and embody qualities of leadership that are truly Christian. Let’s assume that theological schools affirm these qualities and would be pleased if their graduates reflected them. If these assumptions hold, then one might expect theological schools to bend their educational efforts toward this aim.

Is that the case? As best I can tell (with apologies to people who prefer clear lines and straight answers), the answer is both yes and no.

Protestant theological education attends to some of these qualifications exceptionally well while it does not attend to others. And while Roman Catholic theological education attends to all of them more fully, it is still learning how to do this well.

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What are the schools doing well and what are they doing less well? Consider the proposed goal one more time. Most theological schools, especially Protestant schools, are effective educators for the parts of the goal set in italics and less effective for the parts set in roman type in the following restatement: “The goal of theological education is a wisdom of God and *the ways of God fashioned from intellectual*, affective, and behavioral *understanding* and evidenced by spiritual and moral maturity, relational integrity, *knowledge of the Scripture and tradition*, and *the capacity to exercise religious leadership*.”

Theological schools, with their courses and degree programs, along with the organization of scholarship with its disciplines and faculty specialties, provide the kind of theological education that educates students well in *the ways of God fashioned from intellectual understanding and evidenced by knowledge of the Scripture and tradition and the capacity to exercise religious leadership*. Most schools can demonstrate that students have learned about the ways of God, that they know a great deal about Scripture, that they have a good intellectual understanding of the church’s tradition and their particular part of that tradition, and that they have a good understanding of the tasks of ministry and how to perform them. While theological schools devote considerable educational space to learning the tasks of ministry, a school, because it is a *school*, is still better at teaching theology, history, and Scripture, because those areas are learned in the traditional liberal arts patterns of study and schools are structured and organized in ways especially well suited for that kind of learning. A student may learn to love God more, or become more morally or spiritually mature, or come to terms with the way some of his or her personal characteristics influence the practice of ministry, but these results are often an indirect consequence of theological studies. Most of the courses that seminarians take do not identify these kinds of goals as the primary outcomes.

The part of the proposed goal at which Protestant theological education is less effective is the kind of learning that contributes to *a wisdom of God fashioned from affective and behavioral*

understanding and is evidenced by spiritual and moral maturity and relational integrity. While these qualities often do emerge from the study of theology, Scripture, and tradition, they are typically not the enumerated educational goals in those courses. Roman Catholic schools in the United States, by contrast, attend to these areas and expect candidates for priesthood to be prepared for the sacrament of ordination with evidence that these qualities have reached a certain level of maturity. If theological schools value these characteristics and consider them appropriate if not mandatory for Christian ministry, why don't they give explicit attention to them in their educational efforts? I think this inattention occurs for several reasons. Some of them are related to perceptions about education, others to the characteristics of students, and still others to issues in the educational practices.

Perceptions

The first perception is that it is not explicitly the job of theological schools to address these areas. Christian faith is nurtured over time and in many communal contexts. A person who has grown up in church, for example, has likely had experiences in activities like Sunday school, confirmation classes, retreats, service events, mission trips, worship, and even leadership of worship in a community of faith. College years offered additional opportunities to learn and grow in religious sensitivity through campus ministry events. Together, these events, activities, and practices would have provided a wide ecology of support, nurture, and religious instruction that contributed to many of the qualities identified in the proposed goal. The role of the theological school is not to duplicate the tasks that other parts of the ecology can provide but to offer what is needed but less present in those other parts, like substantive intellectual grounding in theology, Scripture, and history. The president of one ATS member school recently said theological education is “about becoming an educated person, knowing the traditions, being able to think critically, being able to express your thoughts.”¹⁷ This president is not even sure that theological

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education is about the cultivation of ministry skills. From this perspective, the primary job of a theological school is intellectual engagement with text and tradition. Schools can't do everything that needs to be done, so stewardship requires them to provide what they do best and what the church and world most need.

The second perception is that while moral and spiritual maturity, relational integrity, and the deep longing for God may be important qualities for ministry, they simply can't be taught in a school. They may be learned, but they are learned over long years, through the experiences and vicissitudes of life, through the moral insight of others, and through dark nights of the soul. This perception is not so much "It's not the school's job" as "Schools simply can't do this job." It does not protest the importance of these qualities for ministerial leadership but argues that they simply cannot be learned in a theological school. Because they are important qualities, the church must assume responsibility for certifying ministerial leaders who give evidence of them. Ultimately, communities of faith must bear the responsibility for certifying the presence of the "gifts and graces" that the church perceives as vital, even when there is no clear indication of how and where those gifts and graces are learned.

Students

Achieving the formational goals described above is also difficult for reasons related to students, especially the current generation of students.

First, this formational goal might be redundant because many current seminary students—unlike previous generations—have already received intensive formation. While the age of students varies widely, and some schools have much younger student bodies than others, in the 2018–2019 academic year there were as many students over fifty enrolled in ATS member schools as there were students under thirty. The overwhelming majority of all students are over thirty years of age, and if these desirable qualities emerge from experience and the work of the Spirit of

God over time, then these students are already “formed”—the developmental aspects of spiritual or moral maturity have already occurred. The theological school can provide a review of these qualities and has a basis for critiquing inadequate versions of them, but the key teachable moment has passed. The students may not be old dogs who can’t learn new tricks, but life may have contributed to a formation in faith that does not need to be reformed in a theological school. In fact, the reason so many students are coming to theological study later in life may very well be the result of the spiritual, moral, and relational maturity they have developed. They have worked in other areas, learned hard lessons, contributed as volunteers to the ministry of their parishes or congregations, and, in their experience and maturity, found a call to ministry. Students coming to theological schools with more developed spiritual, moral, and relational sensitivities do not need a repeat of this kind of formational education. These students most need the scriptural and theological content to be preachers and teachers and the technical skills to perform the tasks they feel called to undertake.

Another issue with the current generation of students relates to the interdenominational quality of many Protestant schools. I mentioned earlier that Christian spirituality is traditioned—it takes particular forms in different Christian communities, with no generic pattern that transcends all those communities. Few theological schools any longer have students from only one denomination. Many do not even have a majority of students from one Christian family. In these schools Unitarian-Universalists, Pentecostals, Anglicans, Baptists, and historic black church members are all preparing for ministry together. While this diversity provides multiple educational benefits, it makes it difficult to educate all students in the particularities of their own communities. One of the reasons Roman Catholic schools may provide better education in terms of the proposed goal is that all MDiv students are Roman Catholic, and while the Roman Catholic community as a whole is far more diverse than any one Protestant community, the homogeneity among students and

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presumed educational outcomes provide deep and meaningful particularities. Schools might find ways to educate formationally across Christian families—they have found, for example, ways to teach different structures of ecclesial polity—but it will require considerable effort. The existence of a rich diversity of ecclesial traditions undoubtedly has a formational impact on students. But if that impact is to form people for faith and ministry, it will require deliberate educational attention.

Educational Issues

Some current educational realities make parts of the formational goal difficult. One of these is the increasing variety of degree programs. While the master of divinity continues to have the largest enrollment of any degree offered by ATS member schools, fewer than half of all students are taking the MDiv. Most are enrolled in one of more than two hundred different degree programs offered by ATS member schools. The formational goal defined in this chapter is not appropriate for all the degree programs offered, which leads to an important qualification. This next future of theological education contains two divergent paths. One is the kind of education that pastors, congregational ministers, and other ordained or rostered leaders need, and the other is the kind needed by persons preparing for ministry-related professions like counseling or social work that do not require ordination, or by persons studying theological disciplines for academic purposes. The “next future” focuses on the first of these paths. While most of the history of American theological education has been about the education of pastors and ordained ministers that serve in a variety of church- or parachurch-related roles, that educational center of gravity has weakened, and this call for a formational pattern of theological education is, among other things, a call to give particular attention to the education of ministers and priests who will serve as religious leaders and spiritual guides in an increasingly secular future. The formational goal for the students in the second track, however, is still relevant. Such students have chosen education in a theological school, and likely

understand their professional specialty in terms of their Christian vocation. The most fundamental formation, as Ted Smith points out in his volume in this series, is formation in faith, and that kind of formation uses all the tools I am advocating for formational theological education.

Another issue is the culture of higher education. Although some forms of higher education have affirmed patterns of formational effort with undergraduates, like attention to vocation in undergraduate education mentioned earlier in this chapter, the emphasis on research and generation of new knowledge that is ubiquitous among research-intensive institutions may not be particularly hospitable to formational patterns of theological education. Divinity schools in research universities have a responsibility to serve the broader university research goals, and this can consume the energy necessary for the kind of formational education I am proposing. In the culture of the research university, noble as it is, producing graduates who are lovers of God and the ways of God will not be valued if the divinity faculty is not also producing the research that will advance theological scholarship. These sophisticated communities of scholarship, of course, can and do provide formational education.

I was interviewing students at a divinity school located in a research university, and a student said that she could tell her friends in other theological schools that her teachers wrote the books her friends were studying. I am not sure what her comment implied about formational theological education—bragging rights might not be formational routes—but it did reveal the power of a theological education with faculty who are intellectual leaders in their fields of study.

The current structures of theological education developed as the religious ecology was strong and most students had been a part of it; as the culture included religion more centrally, even privileging it; and as religious institutions were robust in many ways. These structures cultivated the development of schools and scholarly disciplines that have contributed to more understanding about Scripture and tradition than at any other time in the history of the church, as well as to developments that expanded

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instruction in the pastoral arts at a time when the tasks of ministry were proliferating and the need to do these tasks well was increasing. Much has changed since this structure was developed, and what has been good may not be as good in the context of the changing social location of religion, the degree programs that students want to pursue, the students who attend theological schools, and regnant values in higher education.

The Next Future of Theological Education

Theological education has received many critiques in the last few decades. As the church has struggled, theological education has been blamed for causing its problems or enabling them to persist. Some of these critical analyses have come from outside theological education, such as from leaders of successful megachurches, and some from inside, such as from former professors who bemoan new emphases or educational strategies. The critiques are accompanied with proposals for the next theological education, which range from abandoning it altogether, to returning it to some former glory, to changing it in fundamental ways. My critique is not that current forms or practices are a failure. It is that they reflect a particular cultural moment, a certain time in the life of American churches, and that moment has changed. The coming moment calls on theological schools to emphasize some things that have been present but in the shadows, for them to do some of the things the church used to do so there will be a future in which the church might be able to remember its task. The way that theological education has been done, sophisticated and valuable for one day, is not adequate to the tasks required by a new day.

Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasman have assessed the current influence of theology—broadly defined to include all the disciplines that constitute the curriculum of theological education—in the academy and culture. “Theology has no spectacular new insights to offer, nothing analogous to mountain ranges on dwarf planet Pluto or the genetic basis of certain cancers; there are no stunning new tools to whose design theology has contributed, nothing analogous to a driverless car or the material magic

of graphene.” They lament that in the modern university that thrives on discovery of new knowledge, the core of theological studies has lost its audience and reputation. Volf and Croasman argue that it is partly the fault of the commanding dominance of science and technology and partly the fault of theology remaking itself into a more objective, science-like area of study to compete in this intellectual world. They propose that theology pursue its purpose “to discern, articulate, and commend visions of and paths to flourishing in light of the self-revelation of God in the life, death, resurrection, exaltation, and coming in glory of Jesus Christ, with this entire story, its lows and its highs, bearing witness to a truly flourishing life.” Theology has not always been understood as having its purpose related to a “truly flourishing life,” and in an era of prosperity gospel and frail claims about “flourishing,” it needs substantive explication, which their argument provides. Volf and another collaborator, Justin Crisp, contend that part of the renewal of theology entails a recovery of the union of what the theologians teach and the life they lead, or at least aspire to lead. The “execution of the central theological task requires a certain kind of affinity between the life the theologian seeks to articulate and the life the theologian seeks to lead.” Later, they write: “It would be incongruous for theologians to articulate and commend as *true* a life that they themselves had no aspiration of embracing.”¹⁸ Christian pastors and other religious leaders are theologians in the way that Volf defines theology, and while their focus may be the parish and the world rather than the university, it would be equally incongruous for them to preach what they do not aspire to live.

Theological education has assumed the importance of the character of the Christian life for the Christian leader, with its dimensions of a wisdom of God that is more about loving God than about accumulating information about God. It has assumed the importance of spiritual maturity. It has never doubted that moral maturity is crucial to the practice of ministry and knows firsthand that relational integrity is crucial to the complex patterns of ministerial work. Theological schools are smart enough to know that learning comes in more than one way, and that deep religious learning en-

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gages more than the head. The task for the next theological education is to take seriously what theological educators know and to cultivate the institutional and educational patterns that will give preference to underdeveloped aspects of theological education.

Theological education has had many futures, and I think its next future will need patterns of education that are as intellectually rigorous and pedagogically sophisticated as present patterns, but that also take seriously and responsibly a wider vision of the aims and purposes of theological education than the current model has embraced. The next future of theological education will not be completely different from the current version; schools will need to use the tools they have already developed, recover some patterns of education they have allowed to go dormant, and continue to do some of what they are doing. But they will also need to imagine a larger arena in which theological education does its work. The next future of theological education will concern itself with the content of theological studies, the skills needed for ministerial leadership, *and* the spiritual, moral, and relational character of Christian life to which religious leaders should aspire. It does not give itself permission to exclude any of these areas.