Vocation, Formation, and Theological Education

Interdisciplinary Perspectives from Fuller Theological Seminary

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Edited by
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Tina Houston-Armstrong
Amos Yong

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Preface

This volume represents one set of reflections on issues of vocation, formation, and theological education in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. Each of the contributors to the volume is (or was, in one case) a faculty member at Fuller Theological Seminary, an institution that, like many others, has been wrestling seriously with the global transformation of theological education for at least the past decade. With the generous support of Fuller's Office of Vocation and Formation, the editors of this volume–all of whom at the time of the project's origins directed the PhD program in their respective schools (Downs in the School of Theology, Houston-Armstrong in the School of Psychology, and Yong in the School of Intercultural Studies)–invited colleagues to participate in an interdisciplinary conversation centered around questions of vocation and formation in our own institutional context. This book is the result of that stimulating project. With representative voices from each of these schools, we hope that the essays reflect the interdisciplinary conversations that shaped each contribution. We do not, of course, claim that these contributions will necessarily or adequately address any of the problems that schools like Fuller Seminary face, nor do we imagine that our reflections are applicable in every context, for our experiences invariably reflect the strengths, weaknesses, and peculiarities of our own institutional context. Yet we share these essays because we believe that students preparing for lives of service in a wide range of occupations will gain insight from experienced scholars, all of whom have mentored students in anticipation of vocations in a variety of ministerial, professional, and missional domains.

Note: these essays were written before or during the 2019-

2020 academic year. In the summer of 2020, the School of Psychology (SOP) was renamed the School of Psychology & Marriage and Family Therapy (SOPMFT); then, in the fall of 2020, the School of Theology (SOT) and the School of Intercultural Studies (SIS) were integrated as one new School of Mission and Theology (SMT). The older nomenclature of SOP, SOT, and SIS found in the following essays have not been revised in light of the new school names and configuration in large part because the three major disciplines of theology, intercultural studies, and psychology remain central to work of the faculty and the Seminary's educational offerings.

Acknowledgments

Introduction

Tina Houston-Armstrong, David J. Downs, and Amos Yong

It is now a common trope to note that the landscape of theological education has undergone dramatic shifts in recent years. Seminaries and Christian colleges in the twenty-first century are grappling with challenges raised by cultural changes, shifting demographics, globalization, the politics of identity, financial limitations, new modes of online teaching, and missional questions, among others, to say nothing of the tidal wave of uncertainty that all institutions of higher learning will face in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet these challenges, and others not listed, present opportunities for seminaries and Christian colleges to reflect carefully not only on what they are teaching and how they teach it (as well as how to fund this teaching) but also on how students are formed by and through their learning.

To think about formation in the context of higher education in general and of theological education more particularly is of course not surprising. To be sure, post-secondary education has long been an arena for the formation of the life of the mind. The standard model bequeathed by modernity is the professor – one who professes, note – as the so-called "talking head," a depositor of facts and information in the malleable brains of students who voraciously devour such intellectual data. Content is dispersed and knowledge is expanded, first generally at the undergraduate level where there is learning in the sciences and the humanities as well as in the student's major field of study, and then, for those who pursue further study, at the graduate level where there is deeper comprehension opened up through disciplinary inquiry. Student minds are at the very least

"enlarged," metaphorically speaking, although appropriately so as we mentally picture the in/formative potencies of the professorial lecture.

In the late or post-modern milieu, the "talking head" is perhaps less prevalent at least in some circles (especially in the so-called "flipped classroom" in online platforms) although the professor or instructor facilitates "conversation," which is itself a process that can be understood as central to intellectual formation. While the emphasis now is less on knowledge acquisition (although that obviously continues to happen), it is also clear that minds are formed at least in two interrelated ways: first, that students are invited not merely to receive but also to process what they are given, whether through mini-lectures, readings, or other content media, which is the prerequisite to feeding-back into the discussion, and second, through this process of growth in verbalization and articulative capacity that provides the evidence (so our assessment tools confirm) that learning is occurring, there is reciprocal and interactive dialogue between teachers and students, and between students themselves, that reinforces learning. What is distinct in this more dialogical endeavor is that in its ideal expressions, learning is occurring in both or multiple directions since all conversation partners in principle are able to gain from the exchange. Teachers are here given another venue for embodying the commitment to life-long learning and now through the practice of their craft even as they welcome students into the community of mutual or co-learning wherein the intellectual life is continually deepened, developed, and extended.

As theological educators – which is shorthand in the context of Fuller Seminary's multi-school framework for the theological, missiological, and psychological combined — the formational work that we do is also no less intellectual. The gospel writer records Jesus saying to his followers, "you will know the

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truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32),[1] so that at the least, theological instruction conveys and elaborates on such alethic notions. On the other hand, this same writer also indicated that such truthful knowledge is relationally mediated, pneumatically (he writes) through the divine wind or breath: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13a). Here the knowledge imparted by Jesus the sage—the "talking head," to make the connections to the above explicit—is at least complemented by the more dynamic Spirit-led process. There is a mutuality to the life of the mind in this divine-human interaction even if the metaphor breaks down in that the Spirit cannot be said to be a co-learner in the same way as the human counterpart.

Yet even if post-secondary educational formation remains irreducibly intellectual, the relational character of conversational dialogue highlights also that the cognitive is not and can never be merely cerebral. Dialogue, in other words, is not merely about content, even if such is included; rather, conversation depends on relational capacities and, more to the point, on the skills and competencies that enable interchanges—of ideas surely but also of feelings, hopes, needs, and even wants—that cannot be circumscribed by the intellect. From this perspective, then, formation in the undergraduate and the graduate classroom must also be about practice, not just how we are transformed in our heads, but how we are shaped and equipped with our hands, so to speak. The former ideational or intellectual sphere, we now realize more clearly than ever, is intertwined with the latter performative or practical dimension. The exchange of ideas in the dialogical event is most invigorating and palpable—formative, to be exact—when the conversation partners are skilled in the practice of relating to one another in more engaging ways rather

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[1] All Scripture citations are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

than only conceptually or linguistically.

The formation of heads and hands, then, has to be more clearly in sight when we think about our work as educators. Of course, what immediately comes to mind in the higher educational enterprise is the formation of professionals, whether nurses, doctors, lawyers, counselors, and the like. Here we understand that education enables doing, not necessarily the working with hands in the literal sense—although that is surely true for nurses and doctors, for instance—but the work that requires the application of ideas and theories in the real world, which are the skills and competencies lawyers and counselors (for instance) have to acquire and hone in ways differentiated to their work. Now there may have been a time when such professional work was compartmentalized as being derivative from their foundational concepts or underlying ideas and, especially in the modernist frame, subordinated in importance simply because of the axiological presupposition at least among some that theory precedes practice. Our late or post-modern situation, however, more clearly recognizes that theory actually emerges from practice and goes back to inform practice so that at best, both are part of the hermeneutical circle. There is a fundamental sense, arguably—and here no less from the perspective of developmental psychology—in which the mind is dependent on the hands more so than the other way around. The point, then, is that formation is also about practice in general, surely including the various kinds of more specific practices that inform professional work in various social directions, but no less practice that can also be understood as the other side of—never divorceable from—theory.

As theological (and missiological and psychological) educators, we can follow out the threads of how intellectual and practical formation are interrelated. The life of the mind is interrelated with the work of the hands at least in the sense that knowledge of the truth is never merely for its own sake but for

being set free, as already indicated. Knowing in this theological sense, then, has a teleological direction, so that mere theological learning (intellectualism, or knowing *about* the divine) must open up to something like theological practice (perhaps wisdom, or knowing and loving God) that moves us along life's journey. More particularly, however, theological, missiological, and psychological education also has its practice or professional component: the formation of preachers, pastors/clergy, mission-workers, therapists, and the like. Again, in a former (modernist) era, these expressions were relegated to the realm of practical theology allegedly as a byproduct of the theoretical fields of biblical, historical, and theological studies; and yet again, in the current scene, there is a greater appreciation for the back-and-forth dialogue and mutually informing character of these undertakings. Theological education that does not form practitioners is increasingly dispensable, surely not worth the price of admission. Put another way: theological education that is most powerfully formative of the intellect is also that which inspires action, empowers the hands, and equips for practice that engages the needs and hurts of the real world.

We now need to close the loop, however, in that we must make clear that the formation of heads and hands involves a depth dimension that we can name as the heart. We don't need or want to become mushy so let us put aside any understanding of this notion as referring to the sentimental side of the human. Rather, to expand on the preceding discussion, we are considering here the fully personal aspect of educational formation. If the head is manifest in the words that are part of the dialogue and the hands are the expression of interlocutors as embodied creatures, then the heart focuses on the persons who are at the conversational table. The fully personal in any dialogical encounter brings into the exchange not just abstract ideas and performative or practical skills but tangible loves, concrete desires, and aspirational hopes, and all of these are present if only

implicitly. Intellectual formation, then, not only goes hand-in-hand (pun intended) with practical formation but both are presumably embodied or expressed most fully in and through whole persons.

In the course of undergraduate studies, this aspect of what we are calling heart formation has in general been lodged in what has long been named as the core curriculum. With the humanities at the center (at least historically), this dimension of collegiate formation sought to nurture the critical and moral thinking capacities that shaped the character of student souls. The goal was the infusion of various dispositions and virtues that shape and empower citizens for social participation and responsibility. More recently, then, this combination of intellectual-practical-character formation has been understood more holistically: the formation of whole persons. Such nomenclature is especially prevalent among Christian colleges and universities, so that what happens in the classroom is now situated within, rather than abstracted from, what happens in the chapel, the dorm room, or the athletic event, among other sites. Yes, minds and hands are surely being formed, but members of a whole person rather than on their own.

And whole persons, we know, are shaped in relationship to others not just within their educational institutions of choice but also via the many complex networks outside. For seminarians like in our institutional case, there are of course at the first level communities of various sorts: families, churches/congregations, employers, and other relational communities. Each of these are informed by other voluntary associations: neighborhood, civic, organizational, and so on. All of these are situated within wider local, state, national, transnational, and electronic domains, each layered over by social, economic, political, and related dynamics, and further shaped by cultural, racial, and ethnic factors. Our loves, desires, hopes, and anxieties are forged out of the fluid intersection of these milieus. Here we name the breadth dimensions of our vocational efforts that touch the depths of our hearts, so that formation of whole persons is more effective when

attentive to and engaged with the many levels of student contextual rootedness, exploration, and movements.

As theological, missiological, and psychological educators, then, we can make explicit how these various perspectives are part and parcel of the formational task. Psychologically, our formation as whole persons cannot be less than an interdisciplinary venture since we cannot be whole unless we understand and learn to live integratively. Missiologically and theologically, our formation cannot be any less than for the purposes of discipleship: the capacity to love God and neighbor fully — the former driven by our devotion to the one who matters most and the latter unveiled in our vocational embrace of others, not least in the unfolding of our various professions but as emergent from out of our being called by God to do so. The formation of heads, hands, and hearts, then, is inextricably interwoven. Intellectual inquiry, driven by our curiosity and wonderment at the divine, will never be exhausted, and such is the nature of the life of the mind theologically refracted; yet practical inquiry, motivated by the continuous call of our neighbor, will also continue to require our urgent attention, and such is the nature of the life of discipleship understood as vocationally and missiologically reflected, even as personal transformation, inherent in our nature as created in the *imago Dei*, will be part of our longing and yearning. Any theological formation inattentive to this heart dimension will inevitably be the worse for it.

Overview of the Volume

The essays in the pages to come not only delve deeper into many of the themes mentioned above but also open up other trajectories of inquiry both implicit in the preceding but also quite distinct on their own terms. We have collected them in three parts: the biblical, the theological, and the psychological. The last consists of contributions from our School of Psychology faculty

while the first can be seen as part of the commitment to Scripture that is central to our mission as a seminary rooted in the historic practices of the Christian church. The middle section includes a range of considerations that are loosely categorized as theological, each unfolding considerations of formation in and from various contextual perspectives.

The first part of the book leads off with John Goldingay's "Formation and Vocation in the Scriptures." How do the Scriptures help us in our understanding and practice regarding vocation, our Old Testament colleague asks? His response considers the following: how the Scriptures themselves speak about vocation or calling, how contemporary understanding compares with the thinking in the Scriptures—how it is both broader and narrower—and how the Scriptures might thus be a resource to us in thinking about and responding to our being called by God.

Kirsteen Kim's "Mission and Discipleship: Putting Matthew's Gospel Back Together," follows. Missiologists (and Kim is no exception) not only realize that mission is the mother of theology (as Martin Kähler famously put it over a century ago) but also know that Scripture establishes the basis for missiologically-minded theology and theologically-funded missiology. Proceeding in part from these assumptions, this chapter considers how the commission to make disciples in Matthew's Gospel shows that discipleship is not primarily about personal development but about participation in God's mission to transform the world and work toward a new multicultural community. Three key statements on mission and evangelism, *The Cape Town Commitment*, *Together towards Life*, and *Evangelii Gaudium* are discussed in this direction.[2] Individually and together, these demonstrate a new integration of mission and discipleship, and are suggestive for how contemporary world

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[2] See chapter 2 for the full bibliographic information.

mission perspectives have significant implications for vocational formation in seminary contexts and in Christian higher education.

As both a doctoral student in New Testament studies and one who has worked with the Seminary's Office of Vocation and Formation for a few years, W. Ryan Gutierrez, "Called to a Life of Faithful Agility: The Practice of Learning to Love in 1 Corinthians and Beyond," emerges from this nexus. Recognizing that rapid technological innovation and economic disruptions have forced institutions of higher education to re-examine critically the role knowledge plays in how their students are formed to address challenges created by a rapidly changing world, he observes that such developments raise a theological question: what kind of Christian formation is required to enable students to mobilize their academic learning to meet the unexpected challenges that await them and their communities after graduation? Using Paul's discussion of eating practices in 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1 and looking at a current curricular program at Fuller based around practices, Gutierrez argues that formation produced by a socially embedded way of knowing develops the capacity to meet these unknown challenges in ways that are faithful and agile. What is envisioned, then, as the goal of a theologically reflective and socially embedded way of knowing is a faithful agility that enables students to adapt to disruptions in ways that align with the truth and power of the gospel.

Part two of our book provides various contextual perspectives on formation and vocation in theological education broadly considered. We open with Hak Joon Lee writing on "Formation and Vocation in Ethical Perspective." As a theological ethicist, Lee proposes a covenantal basis of vocation with a focus on its moral aspect and claims that a moral dimension is critical for any idea of vocation, and a covenantal approach addresses this dimension, effectively countervailing the current individualistic and existentialized cultural view of vocation today. In particular, he examines how the biblical idea of covenant can guide the

vocational formation of especially (but not only) young people in such a way that their sense of identity is clarified, their virtue formation is facilitated, and their sense of public responsibility is both awakened and deepened.

Public theologian Sebastian Kim follows with his chapter, "Formation Towards a Community of Credibility: Reflections from the Korean Protestant Church." His considerations are based on the assumption that one of the important aspects of formation for Christian ministry is credibility in the eyes of God, the Christian community, and the wider society. Kim thus examines the credibility gap of the Christian community in two recent cases in Korean Protestant churches and, by employing Martin Marty's conception of the "public church," suggests an agenda for Christian formation in Korean theological education. While this chapter discusses specifically the Korean Protestant churches, the lessons about formation toward a community of credibility apply to theological education in general, including in the West.

Systematic and comparative theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen next unfolds a vision of "Vocation and Formation for a Multireligious World." If among the many and diverse challenges most Christian ministers face in today's secular and religiously pluralistic world, few, if any, are more complex and complicated than interfaith issues, then training for a vocation in a multireligious world calls for both attitudinal shaping and material teaching of other living faiths' spiritualities, teachings, and practices. Ideally, he urges, this kind of training takes place in an interdisciplinary educational setting in which theology, religious studies, and cultural disciplines collaborate. If Fuller might be one of few theological seminaries in the world—with three faculties—which could meet this challenge, then Kärkkäinen seeks to vision and outline such a project.

Leadership professor Scott Cormode argues that "The Vocation of All Christians" should include the work of all followers of Christ. His re-formulation derives from Martin

Luther's insight that all Christians are called by God to love their neighbor wherever they are planted and from the biblical metaphor of ambassador in 2 Corinthians 5. Christians ought to understand that "My vocation proceeds from the people entrusted to my care." The structure of the essay revolves around a series of questions that any Christian can answer in order to clarify and hone his or her own calling in the world.

Tod Bolsinger and Amy Drennan's collaborative "Formation and Vocation (Online) for Leadership" takes off from the reality that all institutions of higher education, theological or otherwise, have suddenly found themselves with the appearance of the coronavirus in 2020: operating remotely, virtually, and fully online! Their work, however, builds on research in this area that has been growing for a few decades. Although focusing on leadership development programs and how recent studies decry their ineffectiveness and log similar complaints often heard by pastors and Christian leaders about the ineffectiveness of seminary education for the actual work of congregational leadership, their response is relevant for theological education more generally. Bolsinger and Drennan explore how online education and formation can enable reconception of leadership formation as a more effective reflective process of both embedded and disrupted contextual formation.

The final collection of essays focuses on the psychological aspects of vocation and formation. With "Spiritual Formation: Our Spiritual Journey to Clinical Practice," Alexis D. Abernethy begins by describing a mutual process of formation that a small group of students and a faculty member engage in over a ten-week period. The aim of the course, Spiritual Formation and Integrative Practice Group, is to provide an experiential formation group that will offer a small group learning experience for students to deepen their reflection on their experience of God's presence in their lives and integrative practice. Key factors that contribute to this transformational opportunity include artistic

expression, individual and group sharing of positive and more challenging experiences with God, and modeling of an integrative life and practice by the professor. Although our biblical scholars and theologians also provide personal accounts, Abernethy's chapter, like many of her fellow psychologists, deploys such skillfully to invite readers into the issues.

Pamela Ebstyne King's "Vocation as Becoming: *Telos*, Thriving, and Joy" lifts up the teleological thread: vocation is an ongoing response to God's grace and call to becoming. As such, vocation is more about joy than a job or profession. Joy entails and invites us to pursue those things that matter most. Theological considerations of human telos suggest that God's purpose for humankind as image bearers is to thrive as we become more like Christ, as our unique selves, and as active participants in God's ongoing work in the world. King presents psychological understandings of thriving that inform how we can grow as we answer God's call and pursue purpose as God's beloved.

Co-authored by Brad D. Strawn (in part from out of his own ministry experiences as a trained psychologist) and one of his doctoral students, Jonathan Doctorian, "The Unknown Vocational Motivations of Seminary Students," unpack the sense that while seminarians may feel a "call" to pursue a vocation in ministry, this "call" will not be enough to help them traverse the challenges of a ministerial vocation. They detail how essential it is that seminarians know themselves and their unconscious vocational motivations in order to face the potential challenges that may ensue. Their chapter explores some of the underlying and unknown psychological motivations of seminarians.

Stephen W. Simpson also provides a personal (counseling) perspective in his "Formation, Deep and Wide." Whereas most professions rely on mastering a specific skill set, existing research is in general agreement that the personal qualities of the therapist have a significant impact on success in mental health treatment. Becoming an effective psychotherapist requires relational,

emotional, and spiritual formation. The suffering and human frailty that arise in psychotherapy have deep theological and spiritual implications. The therapist's vocational journey includes a unique combination of intellectual knowledge, technical skill, emotional growth, and spiritual reflection. Simpson's essay invites readers on this sojourn.

Last but not least, "Embracing Difference: The Instructors Role in Forming Cultural Sensitivity," is presented by Tina Houston-Armstrong from out of her teaching experience. One of the foundational tenants in becoming a health service psychologist is a commitment to cultural and individual differences and diversity. As the American Psychological Association has noted: "*Psychologists, regardless of ethnic/racial background, are [to be] aware of how their own cultural background/experiences, attitudes, values, and biases influence psychological processes.*" Houston-Armstrong suggests that embracing such a perspective on difference and diversity allows for both the therapist and the client to grow and develop, and works to assist emerging professionals in thinking about how their faith is contextualized and how that impacts their view of the world in which they live and work. As fostering a student's development in this area requires an instructor who is willing to engage this journey also, she provides an overview of a signature course assignment and offers a personal reflection on the instructor's preparation process, to assist instructors who may want to replicate a similar assignment. An assignment that supports students in exploring their own theological and socio-cultural worldview is also included, with the aim of developing tools to provide services to people different from themselves.

Welcome to the essays.

Part I
Biblical Perspectives

Vocation in the Scriptures

John Goldingay

How do the Scriptures help us in our understanding and practice regarding vocation? This chapter considers:

- how the Scriptures themselves speak about vocation or calling,
- how contemporary understanding compares with the thinking in the Scriptures – how it is both broader and narrower, and
- how the Scriptures might thus be a resource to us.[1]

The Words

Discovering what the Scriptures say about a topic such as vocation can involve at least three kinds of study. One involves looking at the way the Scriptures use the word in question, and the way they use related words. Another looks at the way we use those words and talk about the topic, and asks about the similarities and differences in relation to the way the Scriptures talk. A third looks at the topic as one that emerges from our context and concerns, and at the way the Scriptures may be talking about the topic in question even if they do not use our word for it. We begin with the first of these three forms of study.

The word *vocation* doesn't come in English translations of the Scriptures, but the word *calling* does come, and *calling* is simply an Anglo-Saxon based word that's equivalent to the Latin-based word *vocation*. In the New Testament it represents the

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[1] I am grateful to Kathleen Scott Goldingay for her comments on this paper. Translations from the Scriptures are my own.

Greek word *klēsis*, from the verb *kaleō*, meaning "call."

The starting point for understanding the idea of a calling or vocation is the fact that God has summoned the church to acknowledge Jesus as Lord. *Summons* and *invitation,* along with *calling* and *vocation,* are other English words that overlap with the New Testament word *klēsis* and help to represent it. God's calling to us, our vocation, our summons, his invitation to us, gives us a confident expectation that he is going to fulfill his purpose for creation and for us (Eph 1:18; 4:4). Our vocation means that we press towards the goal associated with that upward summons (Phil 3:14). We share in a vocation that comes from the heavens (Heb 3:1).

God's calling also means an obligation to live a life now that's worthy of that vocation (Eph 4:1). It is an obligation that God has to enable us to meet (2 Thess 1:11). It is the way we firm up our vocation from God and our choice by God (2 Pet 1:10). That last observation is illuminating for the way it links God's calling of us and God's choice of us. God called or summoned or invited us (2 Pet 1:3); by living God's way, we establish that vocation and thus we eventually get into God's kingdom (2 Pet 1:11). The observation fits with the comment elsewhere that when God saved us and summoned us with a holy vocation, it was not in accordance with our deeds but in accordance with his purpose and grace (2 Tim 1:9). An aspect of the good news is then that "the expressions of grace [*charismata*] and the calling of God are not capable of being revoked" (Rom 11:28–29): God can't change his mind about them. Paul makes this statement regarding the Jewish people, who are loved by God in connection with God's choice of them. But it is also indirectly good news for Gentiles who are grafted into the people that God chose, loved, graced, and called. God has summoned both Jews and Gentiles to make known the riches of his honor (Rom 9:24–25). It is our vocation.

A vocation is thus an obligation, but also a blessing, as is implicit in the presence of the word *invitation* among the English

equivalents to *klēsis* (compare Jesus's comment in Matt 20:16; 22:14 that "many are called but few are chosen"). It is because we are called/invited in one body that Christ's peace can arbitrate in our hearts (Col 3:15). "Out of darkness God called/summoned/invited you into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9). God's people are "summoned Christ Jesus's" (Rom 1:6), "called saints" (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2). It is their vocation. And they are called to hope: the New Testament makes a significant link between vocation and hope. Paul talks about "the hope of God's call" (Eph 1:18). We were called to eternal life (1 Tim 6:12). We were called in the one hope of our call (Eph 4:4). We are "participators in a heavenly call" (Heb 3:1). Jesus died "so that the people who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance" (Heb 9:15). "By trust, Abraham, being called, obeyed by going out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance" (Heb 11:8). "God called you to his eternal honor in Christ Jesus" (1 Pet 5:10).

The two aspects to the vocation of the people of God, as blessing and obligation, are neatly encapsulated in Isaiah 41–42. On one hand, God's calling Israel to be his servant is good news for Israel, because it means God is committed to Israel in the way a master is committed to his servant; if you are called to be God's servant, you do not have to be afraid, you know God will stand by you (Isa 41:8–10). Behind the call of Israel was the call of Abraham, which meant God blessed him and made him many (Isa 51:2). Associated with it is the call of Jerusalem, the call of the community for whom Jerusalem is their city: God's calling them means God will show them a commitment and compassion that will last to the end of the age (Isa 54:6–8). Vocation means blessing for Israel.

On the other hand, masters summon servants because they want something done—if you are called to be God's servant, you have a vocation in terms of embodying what it means to be God's people and thus drawing other people to recognize God

(Isa 42:1–7).

Both Testaments make clear that the object of God's call was thus the people of God as a body. They talk about Israel's vocation and the church's vocation. But the corporate entity is made up of people. They are people whom God determined on ahead of time, who are then called by God in accordance with a purpose, and they are made faithful and honored (Rom 8:28-30). They have a vocation to share in the vocation of the church. They had a vocation that drew them into the fellowship of the Son of God (1 Cor 1:9).

In that sense, we all have the same vocation, the same share in the church's vocation. But this vocation is not only one that applies to everyone in an undifferentiated fashion. Admittedly, whereas 1 Corinthians and Ephesians make key statements about the vocation of the whole church, about the vocation of individual believers, and about the vocation of an apostle, and also make key statements about the graces or gifts of individuals (1 Cor 12; Eph 4), they do not associate any of the vocations with the gifts and graces. But Paul does imply that God called us in a way that relates to our individuality. "Look at your vocation/calling, brothers and sisters, that not many wise in their human nature, not many powerful, not many well-born" were called (1 Cor 1:26). "As the Lord assigned to each person, as God called each person, so they are to live. . . . As a circumcised person someone was called? They are not to become uncircumcised. In a state of uncircumcision someone was called? They are not to be circumcised. . . . Each person is to stay in the calling in which they were called. Were you called as a slave? It shouldn't trouble you" (1 Cor 7:17-21; translations of the rest of this sentence vary, but I take Paul to be encouraging slaves to claim their freedom if they get the chance). This passage naturally worries us in more than one way, so we should pay it special attention as having something to say that confronts our way of thinking. To judge from modern translations, one aspect of its worrying nature is the

fact that it describes our situation as already a vocation before the Lord called us. So modern translations have "stay in the condition/situation in which they were called." But Paul's words suggest that one might expect our vocation as believers to relate closely to our "natural" vocation.

The character of our individual vocation is illumined by the use of the verb *call*. One aspect of the Gospels' talk about vocation is their saying that Jesus didn't come to call faithful people but sinners, but to call them to a change of attitude (Luke 5:32). "You were called/invited/summoned to freedom . . . only not freedom as an opportunity for the sinful nature, but through love be slaves to one another" (Gal 5:13). "God called us not to uncleanness but to sanctity" (1 Thess 4:7). "Walk about in a way worthy of the vocation with which you were called" (Eph 4:1). "I press to the goal of God's upward vocation" (Phil 3:14). Paul prays "that our God may make you worthy of the vocation and may fulfill every good resolve and faithful deed" (2 Thess 1:11). "You were called" to endure, if you do good and then suffer for it (1 Pet 2:20–21). "You were called" to repay wrongdoing or abuse by blessing (1 Pet 3:9). Work is then not our vocation, but it is a context in which we fulfill our vocation.

In some contrast with that general talk of calling, the Gospels also describe Jesus calling James and John, which comes closer to the way we speak of vocation. To think of James and John as having fishing as their vocation would fit with 1 Corinthians 7, but the Gospels more likely assume that they didn't have a vocation until Jesus called them out of their work into a vocation. To speak of his calling is another way of saying that he told them to follow him and that he would make them fish for people, as he had already told Simon and Andrew (Mark 1:16–20). Paul's understanding of his own vocation then overlaps with the Gospels' way of speaking. While he speaks of the members of the congregation as "called Christ Jesus's" (Rom 1:6), "called saints" (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2), in the same context he also speaks of himself

as "called an apostle" (Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1). "God saw fit, having set me apart from my mother's womb and summoned me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles" (Gal 1:15–16). Paul reflects the way his Scriptures speak of God calling or summoning a prophet (Isa 49:1); as well as summoning this prophet from the womb, God called someone else from the east to be his agent (Isa 41:2; 46:11). In Isaiah and in Paul it is typical that receiving a vocation issues in trouble, persecution, and other forms of suffering.

The way the Scriptures talk about vocation, then, suggests a series of insights.

- My vocation is a call, a summons, and an invitation.
- Vocation is part of God's summons to the church to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and to be his servant.
- Vocation is part of God's invitation to the church to live in hope on the basis of what God is going to do.
- But my vocation is also mine individually: it is (e.g.) to be a slave to my brothers and sisters, to endure persecution, to bless my attackers rather than attack back.
- My vocation may relate to who I was before I came to know Jesus.
- My vocation may not relate to my gifts or graces.
- While everyone shares in the vocation of the people of God, some people (e.g., Jeremiah, Paul) had special vocations.

Vocation as We Think of It

In the United States, we have come to put a number of ideas about vocation together.

- Work is something God calls us to as part of being involved in his work in the world.
- My work is my vocation.
- My vocation will be related to my passions, gifts, and

personality.

- Recognizing and fulfilling my vocation helps me to recognize and value who I am.
- God has in mind a specific vocation for me.
- Fulfilling my vocation will be an aspect of my becoming the person I was created to be.
- My vocation will be a way I play a part in God's redemptive purpose for the world.
- My vocation will be particular to me, so I need to find out what is my specific vocation.
- The place God calls me to is where my deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.
- Vocation applies to being a project manager, realtor, cook, butcher, politician, farmer, homemaker, carpet fitter, novelist, mother, or police officer, not just to being a pastor, missionary, or therapist.

While our study of "The Words" suggests that these ideas do not correspond to the way the Scriptures speak about vocation, in itself that lack of fit need not mean that the ideas are unscriptural in substance. There is nothing unusual about the fact that our talk about this particular subject has little point of connection with the scriptural talk about it. (It is equally true of our talk of justice, covenant, mission, holiness, the image of God, the kingdom of God, the church, ministry, worship, prayer, or leadership.) The question is, do the Scriptures talk about these ideas even though they do not relate them to "vocation"? But the lack of correspondence does raise the question of how far our interest in these ideas issue from our cultural context. It is inevitably the case that our thinking is substantially shaped by our culture. While in some ways our thinking may then fit in with the Scriptures in a broader sense, in some ways it may not. It is important to analyze what aspects of our cultural context have made a particular question significant, then to work both with the

need to speak to people in their cultural context but also to help them escape from its limitations.

One problematic area in our thinking in this connection is the way we think of work. The Scriptures have little by way of a theology of work, as they have little by way of a theology of food, housing, sleep, vacation, leisure, or poetry. (They have more by way of a theology of time, land, and family.) I suspect that this shortfall is because they didn't need one. Everybody knows that you must work if you are to eat. Thus the comments about work in Proverbs or 2 Thess 3:7–12 are pragmatic ones. One reason why the Scriptures do not think of work as a vocation is, then, that they do not think of work as something separate from life. There is a link with the fact that in Israel, and perhaps in earlier centuries in the West, work and worship were interrelated. The festivals were key occasions in the work year when people took time off to thank God for his gifts in creation as well as his involvement in Israel's life.

We conflate work, employment, pay, and our personal significance. In the First Testament there is little by way of employment, of selling one's labor. Most people work on the family farm or in the family business, which has the aim of doing enough to meet the family's needs and to have a little bit over for bartering and for helping other families in need. There is no difference in status or significance between the work that the men do out in the fields or in the metalwork shop, and the work the women do in the house. Indeed, the Scriptures' most spectacular account of a worker comes in the A–Z of a woman's working day in Proverbs 31:10–31. In more recent times in the United States, too, most people had to do what they had to do— they were farmers, servants, or homemakers because their circumstances required it. (This consideration again fits 1 Cor 7.) In the Gospels, the family business dynamic continues in the lives of the Galilee fishermen; while Jesus talks quite a bit about employees, it is because it provides him with illustrations not because he is

reflecting on its inherent significance.

Related to these realities is a second problematic area in our culture: people's need to gain a sense of significance. In the Scriptures people do not choose a particular form of work or way of life that matches who they are. Nor is engaging in work or fulfilling their vocation their way of playing a part in God's redemptive purpose. Paul does in effect speak of his work as being given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:17) and as completing the shortfall in Christ's suffering (Col 1:24), but that ministry and suffering is an aspect of his and his associates' distinctive vocation. It is been said that nowhere do the Scriptures suggest that we contribute anything to God's redemptive purpose except our sins.

While the Scriptures emphasize people's gifts and graces, they do not relate these gifts and grace to their work, vocation, or personal fulfillment. They relate them to service in the church. And the Scriptures do not suggest that God generally has a view on what work an individual should do, any more than on whom they should marry. (The only people for whom God designates a spouse are Isaac and Hosea, and it relates to their vocation.) God, being a loving father, doesn't want to tell people what to do with their lives, any more than he wants to decide who they should marry. He wants them to decide. God says, do whatever job you like. I'm looking forward to seeing what you choose.

So some of the cultural background to our thinking about vocation raises issues that the Scriptures in their cultural contexts do not consider. Yet even where people's way of thinking doesn't fit with the Scriptures, we have to start where people are, as the Scriptures themselves assume. Jesus talks about the Torah making allowance for our hardness of hearts as well as starting from God's creation vision and intent. The same feature may appear in instruction of the kind that Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 7 when he tells slaves to stay as they are in their vocation. A related feature of the Scriptures is that they sometimes model a way of thinking

that bases itself on commonsense, exercised within the context of knowing the fundamentals of God's relationship with us. Proverbs works this way. This framework is significant for thinking about vocation and formation. One example that the Scriptures illustrate is the relationship between vocations that God devises and vocations we devise. God devised the vocation of prophet and apostle. The people of God devised the vocations of priest, king, bishop, deacon, theologian, monk, and senior pastor, and God then adapted to them.

We are inclined to focus on the question what gifts we have (in which the Scriptures show no interest outside the context of church life), and it is a commonsense question in our individualistic cultural context. To pull the question into a more scriptural framework would mean asking how God has made me someone who could be a servant to him and to other people, whether or not the exercise of my gifts brings me fulfillment. It would have suited me personally to give up classroom teaching and church pastoring earlier than I did, but I continued because it was my vocation, and the same applies to my continuing online teaching. It meant I could do that work knowing that God would sustain me even though it had become a burden rather than the privilege it once felt.

Likewise we are inclined to ask what work we *should* do and to ask how we decide on the question. While there are no doubt jobs that involve activities that are inherently wrong and that could not be vocations, beyond that point there's no talk in the Scriptures about vocational discernment. Their implication is that an inability to identify your vocation means either God has not given you one or you're resisting it. There is no distinctive Christian angle on the question of seeing what work we should do except the awareness that I may be being called to something that goes against my preferences and sense of gifting (like Moses or Jeremiah). When I sensed God calling me to the ministry, one question the Church of England encouraged such a person to

think about was whether one had a love for people. I did not, but somehow I proceeded anyway and have more love for people now.

One reason why it is important to us to know what job we should do is that in our culture we feel the need to feel significant and special, and a sense of vocation helps us in this connection. It provides a sense that we are here for some reason. It is essentially a self-centered concern, and in the end it is not one likely to reduce our hopelessness and stress. Counseling people in connection with vocation might mean helping them deal with that need, rather than avoiding facing it and masking it by making vocation fulfill it. It would mean helping them discover the way God relates to them. There is a link with the indications in the Scriptures that having a special vocation can lead people into sin, as happened with Saul, David, and Solomon, and maybe with Moses, Aaron, and Peter. Secular and Christian leaders fall into sin, and I know its dynamics in my own life, and that sense of being special or of needing to be special may relate to this dynamic. Once someone thinks they are special and/or once they are in a position of power, they can find rationales for not keeping the rules that apply to other people.

Vocation and Wisdom

It has been said that the language of vocation has disappeared from Christian thinking. If that is so, it means we can fill the language with scriptural content. On the other hand, it is also said that secular self-help thinking is full of the language of vocation, so that this metaphor has been taken over by the secular world in the same way as the word *mission*. Ordinary people want to know about the distinctive individual meaning or purpose of their lives, and vocation is a framework for asking the question. This suggests two insights. One is the need to keep the question about vocation as a question about a relationship with God. The other insight is that the question about vocation is a question

about insight.

If we want to think about living our everyday life as individuals, then the Scriptures that speak most directly to its questions are the so-called Wisdom books, Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, with which one can also associate the other Solomonic book, the Song of Songs. It might be better to call them the commonsense books or the insight books. These Scriptures could be a key resource in connection with what we call vocational formation, the shaping of people to be functioning members of the people of God as it fulfills its vocation. They handle key questions about work, expectations, suffering, and sex, and they offer to reshape our thinking about questions that do or need to surface in connection with vocational formation.

They do so against the background of knowing who God is. Although they do not refer to what God did to make Israel Israel, nor to what God is going to do to fulfill his purpose in the world and for Israel, they do not talk about a life from which God is absent. In the English Bible they suggestively appear between the books relating what God has done in the past and the books talking of what God is going to do in the future, with the possible implication that they speak especially about what God is doing now and how people relate to God now.

Proverbs begins (1:1–7) by interrelating

- insight or shrewdness or smartness,
- ethics in the form of faithfulness or fairness or doing the right thing by other people, and
- awe towards God or submission to God (translations commonly have "the fear of God," but that rendering gives the wrong impression).

Proverbs goes on to talk about (among other things) sexual faithfulness, trust in God, generosity, acceptance of discipline, confidence for the future, truthfulness, love of one's neighbor, hard work, and self-controlled speech. Vocational formation, then, suggests learning to be in submission, to trust, to do the right

thing, and to expect things to work out. And the key to such learning is knowing who God is and listening to wise teachers.

Pairing with that passage at the opening of Proverbs is the portrait of a powerful woman that closes Proverbs (31:10–31), which has overlapping implications. Work is central to this woman's fulfilling her vocation, though her work is not employment and it is not work separated from life and home. Her range of activities and achievements is discouraging for any ordinary mortal. But integral to them is the same awe for God or submission to God that the opening of Proverbs commends. Also integral to the picture is that her fulfilling her vocation includes teaching people with the kind of insight that expresses commitment and that includes generosity to needy people in the community.

The Song of Songs focuses on learning to love. This loving belongs in the context of a sexual relationship that is all-consuming and exclusive and likely to be lifelong, but that doesn't find things working out in a straightforward way. The relationship meets with opposition within the family and within the broader community. But it puts before the readers the ideal of not giving up.

Ecclesiastes invites people to recognize that the things people think will give their lives meaning cannot actually do so. Degrees, fun, culture, achievements, work, possessions, relationships: they are all finally hollow. You are not going to change the world, Ecclesiastes urges. And you are going to die, and you need to live in light of that fact. It is a particularly important set of insights for a young person or an old person.

Job offers multiplex resources for dealing with personal tragedy. An aspect of the book that I especially love is that Job never knows what lies behind his tragedy, which means he has to live with it the same way as we often have to. Like the rest of the Scriptures, it has no answer to the question about theodicy. Instead, it deals with the question what you do with tragedy, how

you look at it. It is in this connection that it offers its multiplex resources. Tragedy does mean you have to ask questions about your own responsibility for what has happened—is it your fault? But for Job, at least, the answer does not lie here. What Job does not know is that tragedy may test you, help you and God see who you are. It drives you to protest to God about it. It forces you to recognize that in the end you simply have to submit to God and that there are reasons why you not only must but can do so. It invites you to wonder if there might be a new day to dawn.

Maybe nothing is more important in thinking about vocation than relating it to suffering. Don McCullin, a photojournalist who has especially photographed scenes of conflict and hardship, "readily admits that he has been scarred by his experiences and thinks of his indisposition as part of his *vocation:* 'seeing, looking at what others cannot bear to see is what my life is all about'."[2] After the shootings in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 2019, Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge, visited the country, and in meeting people who had lost loved ones, spoke as someone who had had the experience of losing his mother in a horrific auto accident. He knew that he had been shaped by having to come to terms with that loss. Being heir to the throne is not a vocation in the sense of something he can accept or decline, but it is a vocation in the sense of a position that calls him to the kind of life of service that his grandmother has lived. The shaping effect of his loss will have a decisive role in determining the way he fulfills his vocation.

The three schools in Fuller stand symbolically for three roles in connection with vocation. The School of Psychology stands symbolically for people gaining some self-knowledge in connection with their concern about the meaning and purpose of their lives, so that they can look at the vocation question from a

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[2] Jeremy Harding, "At Tate Britain: Don McCullin," *London Review of Books* (April 18, 2019): 20.

less therapeutic angle. The School of Theology stands symbolically for people gaining some knowledge of the truth about God in whose context questions about God's calling of us need to be set. The School of Intercultural Studies stands for people gaining some knowledge of the cultures in which questions about vocation arise and of what the fulfillment of vocations then looks like.

My Vocation
When I was about eight weeks
my parents had me baptized
and thus initiated me into the vocation of the church

When I was about eight
they sent me off to Sunday School
which led to my coming to realize that vocation

When I was about eighteen
God gave me a vocation
to church ministry

When I was about twenty-eight
I drifted into being an Old Testament professor
which you might say became my vocation

When I was about thirty-eight
I knew that my vocation was to look after my wife Ann
(she was becoming more and more disabled with multiple sclerosis)

When I was about forty-eight
I fell into becoming a theological college principal (seminary president, in U.S.-speak)
which I guess became my vocation

When I was about fifty-eight
I segued into becoming more of a theologian and writer
which perhaps became my vocation

When I was about sixty-eight
I accepted a vocation
to be volunteer priest-in-charge of a small church

When I am about seventy-eight
I may glide into full retirement and think about vocations I
might have followed
such as rock journalist or therapist or drummer

When I am about eighty-eight
perhaps I will have a specific vocation
in the new Jerusalem

Formational Practices and Resources

Read through the Scriptures, three chapters per day, starting at Genesis, Job, and Matthew. Ask of each chapter: what does it suggest about the church's vocation and about my vocation? What difference might it make to my thinking and life? Do not worry if only one of the chapters each day has something illuminating to say. One out of three ain't bad, as Meat Loaf didn't say.

Specific resources:
- Exodus 3–4
- 1 Samuel 8–12
- Proverbs 31:10–31
- Mark 1
- 1 Corinthians 7
- Ephesians

Vocation as Discipleship and Mission
Reading Matthew's Gospel from the Back

Kirsteen Kim

The Christian calling (vocation) is to follow Christ in a life of discipleship. From where I sit, a quick web search on "discipleship" brings up a host of, mostly well-informed, US American evangelical websites. These present discipleship as a process of conversion, following Jesus in personal life, spiritual growth toward maturity, and development of Christian community. They note that discipleship comes with a cost, requires discipline, and is relational. They also mention that being a disciple requires us to evangelize and disciple others, resulting in church growth.

This is all well and good and can be justified on the basis of Matthew's Gospel, which especially focuses on discipleship and disciple-making.[1] But it is missing the larger picture painted by Matthew. Matthew's Gospel concludes with what is often referred to as "the Great Commission":

> "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:18–20).[2]

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[1] R. Geoffrey Harris, *Mission in the Gospels* (London: Epworth, 2004), 62.

[2] All Scripture citations are from the NRSV unless otherwise

If these verses are taken as the climax of the Gospel, then discipleship is not primarily about us, our personal relationships, and the growth of our community.[3] A reading that integrates the call to be disciples and the commission with which the Gospel concludes shows that discipleship from the perspective of Matthew moves us beyond our own concerns and our own social location. It is a matter of service in the kingdom of heaven, which extends to the ends of the earth and the end of time. It is about the coming of a new community of all nations headed by Jesus Christ. It is about participation in the mission of the Son and Spirit among all nations and in the very life of God.

Taking its cue from Matthew's understanding of discipleship, this chapter will also engage with the three recent statements by the world's churches on mission and evangelism: *The Cape Town Commitment*, *Together towards Life*, and *Evangelii Gaudium*.[4] Individually and together, these demonstrate a new integration of mission and discipleship which makes sense of the whole of Matthew's Gospel, starting from the "Great

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noted.

[3] See David P. Setran and Chris A. Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 118–19 and Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of This World: Inquiries into Calling, Career Choice, and the Design of Human Work* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 50.

[4] Lausanne Movement, *The Cape Town Commitment* (2011): https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment (accessed 5/16/19); World Council of Churches, *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (September 4, 2013): https:// www. oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changin g-landscapes (accessed 5/16/19); and Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013): http://www.vatican.va/content/ francesco/ en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_ 20 13 1124_evangelii-gaudium.html (accessed 5/16/ 19). Between them, these global bodies claim to represent the vast majority of the world's Christians.

Commission" at the end. I will show that these biblical and contemporary world mission perspectives on "missional discipleship" have significant implications for vocational formation in seminary contexts and in Christian higher education, especially in a globalized world and pluralized societies.[5]

Discipleship as Missional in Matthew's Gospel

Discipleship in Matthew's Gospel refers to followers of Jesus of Nazareth and also to Christians in the current age.[6] Jesus sets the pattern for discipleship starting with his baptism at the hand of John (3:13–17). He wrestles with the temptations that would distract him from his vocation (4:1–11) as his disciples would later do. He calls twelve men into a ministry that he has already begun (4:18–25; 9:9–13; 10:1–4) and forms them as disciples alongside him as he demonstrates the gospel by healing and liberation (11:4–6). He sends them out in humble and costly mission to their own people (10:4–42) and expects ultimate loyalty and service (12:46–50; 20:20–28). At the same time, he instructs them, and wider crowds, in righteous living and just relationships (most notably in 5:1–7:29). As he goes to his death, the crowds and his chosen twelve betray or desert him (26:1–27:66). A group of women were faithful[7] and they became the witnesses to his resurrection and the first evangelists (27:55–56, 61; 28:1–10). Finally (28:16–20), Jesus commissions the remaining committed disciples to incorporate others from all nations, or peoples, into a

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[5] I use the word missional in this paper in a biblical-theological sense of sending, and not in its corporate business sense of purpose. For a distinction, see Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 43–44.

[6] Terence L. Donaldson, "Guiding Readers – Making Disciples," *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (ed. Richard Longenecker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 30.

[7] And another disciple, Joseph of Arimathea (27:57–60).

community of servanthood.[8]

For various reasons, modern biblical scholarship has cast doubt on whether the "the Great Commission" was ever on the lips of Jesus of Nazareth.[9] However, today there is a consensus that, at least from a literary point of view, Matthew 28:16–20 is an integral part of the Gospel and even acts as a summary of Jesus' teaching therein.[10] Commentators point to the way it contributes to the framing of the Gospel. For example, the theme of Emmanuel, God with us, at the beginning is matched by the promise "I am with you always" (1:23; 28:20; cf. 18.20) and Jesus is presented as a blessing to the nations like Abraham and a king with authority like David (cf. 1:1). The commissioning is another instance, like the "sermon on the mount" (chs. 5–7) in which Jesus is the law-giver like Moses – in this case, it is especially close to the commissioning of Joshua (Deut 31:23). The passage appears as another pointer to the fulfilment of the prophecy of Daniel of the coming of the Son of Man (Dan 7:13; cf. Matt 24:30; 26:34).[11]

Nevertheless, the commission to the eleven to replicate disciples in all nations comes at the very end of the Gospel as a twist in the plot. Before this point, Jesus's mission, and that of his disciples, is only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10:5–6; 15:24). Donald Senior showed how the death and resurrection of Jesus are a fulcrum in the Gospel after which the limitation to the house of Israel is now lifted and the horizon is

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[8] Ben Cooper, *Incorporated Servanthood: Commitment and Discipleship in the Gospel of Matthew* (London: T&T Clark, 2013).

[9] Paul Foster, *Community, Law, and Mission in Matthew's Gospel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 218–52.

[10] Dale C. Allison, *Matthew: A Shorter Commentary* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 548–49.

[11] David J. Bosch, "The Structure of Mission," *Exploring Church Growth* (ed. Wilbert R. Shenk; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 218–48; Harris, *Mission*, 60–69; and Dean Flemming, *Why Mission?* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015), 12–22.

the whole inhabited earth.[12] The reader has to wait until all is fulfilled (5:17) for the new age of the kingdom to dawn with the death and resurrection of Jesus. Earlier, Jesus was an interpreter of the law of Moses; now the message is the gospel of Jesus. And one could add that before mission was the specialization of the disciples whereas now it is the responsibility of all the baptized—including women.

Dean Flemming argues that the Gospel of Matthew should be read "from the back" or "backwards."[13] He gives two reasons for this: first, to make literary sense of Matthew's Gospel, which he understands as a narrative in which the mystery is revealed at the end, and second, to discover the significance for the meaning of the Gospel as a whole of the "Great Commission," which concludes the book. In the first case, re-reading the Gospel, it is apparent that there are many clues earlier in the narrative to the eventual opening to all nations. The opening genealogy names four gentile—Tamar, Ruth, Rahab, and Bathsheba—women as ancestors of the Messiah (1:1–18). The holy family were sheltered in Egypt to the south and the Magi came from the east to worship him (2:1–23). Jesus began his ministry in "Galilee of the nations" (4:15; cf. Isa 9:1) and Gentiles came to Jesus during his ministry: a Roman centurion (8:5–13) and a Canaanite woman (15:21–28). The leaders of Israel are warned that the kingdom or vineyard will be taken away from them (21:33–46) and that the gospel will be proclaimed in all the world (24:14). They are criticized for their unfaithfulness in increasingly harsh terms as Jesus faces to death (27:24–25). In the second case, Matthew's Gospel is reflexive in the sense that the commission at the end sends the reader back to the beginning to read the story again in light of this turn of events. Moreover, the community of disciples emerges as the prototype

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[12] Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 240–49.

[13] Flemming, *Why Mission*, 1–2, 12.

of the universal church with its diversity, tensions, and need of instruction (16:18; 18:17). Matthew's Gospel does not have a sequel like Luke's, so what the author wants to say about the church he says by talking about the community of disciples and the people.[14] By the reflexive nature of the Gospel, all disciples are also in mission to all nations.

Moreover, reading from the back also applies to the way that Matthew reinterprets Israel's history in light of Jesus the Messiah, who fulfils it all and embodies a new stage in God's mission.[15] Much of Matthew's Gospel can be viewed as a commentary on the last chapters of Isaiah of the gathering of the nations.[16] Canonically, Matthew is a bridge between the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Testament. It arises from a time in which what began among the people of Israel has attracted Gentiles in large numbers and the Jewish-origin church is struggling to work out the reconciled relationship between them that is called for by the gospel (e.g., Eph 2:11–22).[17]

Reading from the back, as Flemming explains, an outgoing mission is built into the concept of discipleship as Jesus taught and modeled it in the Gospel.[18] Mission is integral to the call of the disciples who are to "fish for people" (Matt 4:19). The disciples are expected to learn the itinerant mission of Jesus and experience similar suffering (10:1–42). So, Jesus's mission model and his teaching must apply to the worldwide mission. The very concrete depiction of discipleship in the Gospel suggests that the vision of a world mission is actual, not merely ideal.[19] Moreover, there is

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[14] See Matt 10:17–18 where Jesus "fast-forwards"; cf. Flemming, *Why Mission*, 11.

[15] Flemming, *Why Mission*, 3–4.

[16] Harris, *Mission*, 37–40, 52–60.

[17] Allison, *Matthew*, xxviii–xxix.

[18] Flemming, *Why Mission*, 2.

[19] As even a cautious interpreter concludes; cf. Foster, *Community*, 259–60.

circumstantial evidence: the worldwide nature of Christianity, which is an ancient characteristic as well as a contemporary one,[20] can only be satisfactorily explained if these verses were understood by Jesus's disciples as a real imperative, to which ancient traditions attest.

Mission as Discipleship in Matthew's Gospel

Not only has mission often been left out of the understanding of discipleship in Matthew but, conversely, Matthew's "Great Commission" has often been interpreted without reference to its context as the last words of Matthew's Gospel. Particularly in colonial era Protestant missions, Matt 28:16–20 was held up as a free-standing text to justify missions.[21] These missions, in many cases, colluded with governments to annex other nations to European empires and deprived the local people of their land, their livelihood, and even their lives.[22] The biblical text seemed to fit a colonial context of civilizing, world travel, authority over all nations, and military obedience. Jesus was pictured on the mountain top directing the apostles in a world missionary enterprise. Postwar evangelical missions similarly used Matt 28:18–20 as a sufficient justification of evangelical missions. In his landmark work, David Bosch complained that mission was justified "in a most simplistic form of biblical literalism and proof-texting, with hardly any attempt at understanding the commission from within the context in which it appears in Scripture."[23] He argued that instead of limiting our theology of mission to what can be read out of Matt 28:18–20, we

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[20] Sebastian Kim and Kirsteen Kim, *Christianity as a World Religion* (2nd ed.; London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

[21] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 339–41.

[22] Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

[23] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 341.

should consider the mission theology of the Gospel of Matthew as a whole.

By reading Matt 28:16–20 in light of the whole of the manuscript that precedes it, Bosch and others have re-interpreted it as follows to counter imperialist interpretations:[24]

- In Matthew's account, like Moses, Jesus teaches from the "mountain" (v.16). He commissions the disciples on a mountain in Galilee, the diverse region on the edge of Israel in which he began his ministry. The predominant messianic expectation is that the Gentiles will come to Zion's mountain,[25] but in Jesus's mission the center is displaced and the direction is reversed,[26] following the example of Jesus who goes to the margins and he reaches out to the strangers.

- The disciples "worshipped" Jesus not in a context of triumphalism but of fear and confusion, which caused them to "doubt" (v. 17). They had not chosen to follow this rabbi[27] but Jesus had called them for his mission and they responded to the living Lord who loved them with praise and contemplation.[28]

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[24] Bosch, "Structure of Mission" and Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 56–83. See also Flemming, *Why Mission*, 13–22 and Harris, *Mission in the Gospels*, 40–52, 60–69. Although some commentators find the passage irredeemably colonialist; cf. Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St Louis, MO: Chalice, 2000).

[25] Although Isaiah's prophecy does include a sending to the nations (Isa 66:19–20).

[26] Foster, *Community*, 251–52.

[27] Which would have been the pattern of the time. See VănThanh Nguyễn, "A Biblical Foundation of Missionary Discipleship," *Missionary Discipleship in Glocal Contexts* (eds. Lazar T. Stanislaus and VănThanh Nguyễn; Siegburg: Franz Schmitt, 2018), 121–35.

[28] Cf. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Contemplation in the Midst of Chaos," *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher* (eds. L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 48–74.

- Jesus claimed "all authority," over "all nations," "all things," and "always." Bitrus Sarma argues that Matthew's Gospel presents throughout the economy of Father, Son and Spirit working together for our salvation, as signaled by trinitarian formula of baptism (v. 19).[29] In other words, by following Christ, the disciples are participating not in a church-led enterprise but in the mission of God. Moreover, comparison of Matthew 28 with Matthew 10, shows that the authority given to the disciples is not total but for specific tasks and that, like Jesus's authority, it is evidenced in self-sacrifice. The disciples are sheep among wolves, limited in their power and understanding, and victims rather than conquerors. The community models the kingdom it proclaims by a holistic mission of healing and justice.[30]

- Grammatically, the imperative of the first phrase of verse 19 is not "go" but "make disciples," which is the activity that Jesus demonstrates throughout Matthew's Gospel. The Gospel plots a journey of Jesus and the disciples, expects them to travel further, and anticipates that the community of disciples will be diverse, multi-cultural, and worldwide. However, Jesus was not giving a mandate for world missions in the modern sense; rather, the commission marks the opening of Jesus's humble and costly mission to the rest of the world. Through making disciples and remaining present with his disciples in the church (18:20–22), Jesus's mission of healing and liberation continues to the end of time.

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[29] Bitrus A. Sarma, *Hermeneutics of Mission in Matthew* (Carlisle, UK: Langham, 2015).

[30] Stuart C. Bate, "Matthew 10: A Mission Mandate for the Global Context," *To Cast Fire upon the Earth: Bible and Mission Collaborating in Today's Multicultural Global Context* (ed. Teresa Okure; Pietermaritzburg, SA: Cluster, 2000), 42–56.

- Commentators point out that, although there are lists of other nations in the scriptures, "all nations" is also a biblical way of referring to the rest of the world. Sometimes the people of Israel themselves are excluded from this category but often they are included (cf. 24:9; 25:32). "All nations" here appears as a fulfilment of God's promise to Jesus's ancestor Abraham that "in you all the nations of the earth will be blessed" (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 28:14).[31] Furthermore, the measure of Jesus's mission is not territorial or in terms of numbers but covenantal: it is successful when the people of God live out the new law that Jesus taught and welcome others as Jesus has welcomed them.[32]
- Bosch found it significant that "baptizing" comes before "teaching" in these verses because this contrasts with much colonial missionary practice in which baptism was withheld pending catechesis. When Matthew refers to baptism in his Gospel as a whole, it is a reminder of the unconditional mercy of God and means receiving the forgiveness and justice of the kingdom.[33] Baptizing is what John the Baptist does to form the Jewish community that Jesus subsequently leads, and which becomes the global or catholic and missional community. In Matthew's telling, by virtue of their common baptism, all disciples share an allegiance which transcends not only nation but even family (e.g. Matt 12:46–50).
- The reference to "teaching" (28:20) must be understood in light of Jesus teaching in Matthew's Gospel, which is authenticated by his deeds of mercy and justice (11:4–5) and by his blameless character (27:19, 23, 24). The Gospel

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[31] Flemming, *Why Mission*, 16.
[32] Cf. Bosch, "Structure of Mission."
[33] Bosch, "Structure of Mission," 233.

is constructed as a repeated pattern of narrative about Jesus followed by his teaching.[34] It includes the most extensive collection of Jesus's words—"the sermon on the mount"—in which he expounds the new ethics and principles of the new society that Matthew refers to as the kingdom of heaven (chs. 5-7). In another teaching section, Jesus describes the final judgment, in which the sheep are separated from the goats on the basis of whether they cared for "the least of these" (25:31–46). For Matthew, the disciples are to be especially concerned for "the least," "the little ones" (10:42; 18:6, 10, 14; 19:13–14; 25:40, 45). Those beyond the covenant people also receive mercy.[35] Although Jesus makes the first commandment love of God, the second is "like it": "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (22:34–40). Jesus exhorts love of neighbor three times in the Gospel (5:43; 19:19; 22:39) and practicing it is the only evidence that we love God (25:34, 40). Not a successful church or effective mission but love of neighbor is at the heart of Matthew's Gospel, and it is the essence of our vocation, call, or commission.[36]

- The mission of making disciples according to Matthew takes place between the incarnation and "the end of the age," during which Jesus promises to be with them. The final judgment scene of Matthew 25 implies that the good which disciples do in this era will have continuing value in the age to come. Only in such an eschatological perspective does vocation have purpose.[37] Jesus's promise to the disciples is not of glory and success in mission but of comfort in suffering.

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[34] Allison, *Matthew*, xxii–xxv.

[35] Tommy Givens, *We the People: Israel and the Catholicity of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014).

[36] Hardy, *Fabric of This World*, 46, 53–54.

[37] Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation*, 121–23.

Discipleship in Contemporary Mission Statements

While the missional nature of discipleship has been neglected, the relevance of discipleship to mission has risen to prominence as a missiological theme recently. This is evident from the three official statements on mission made in the last decade by the leading global church bodies.

Discipleship is a leading theme in the first part of *Cape Town Commitment* which was prepared by a small but globally representative working group for the Third Lausanne Congress of evangelical mission leaders which took place in South Africa in 2010.[38] It is divided into two parts: theological foundation followed by application. The task of "making disciples" is the leading description of the church's mission (CTC Preamble) and "disciples" is a frequent description of Christians throughout. The life of the disciples is described as experiencing and sharing the gospel to the ends of the earth (1.8) and as being "one family among the nations," "a community of the reconciled" (1.9.C). Discipleship is a key condition for, and characteristic of, leadership (2.IID.3). In the context of "shallowness" and "disunity" (Conclusion), the CTC stresses an ethical approach to mission—"biblical living" (1.6)—that is supported by references to the teaching of Jesus in Matthew (especially chapters 5–7 and 25). The theology of mission in CTC part 1 is based on the mission of the triune God manifest in biblical narrative of salvation history (1.10). The chief characteristic of God, as manifest in the framing of CTC part 1, is love. The church's mission is a response to that love and is described as integral or holistic. The theme of God's love is supported most often from the Johannine corpus but Matthew's Gospel is also prominent, and from its perspective, the "Great Commission" is set within the "Great Commandment." Part 2 concludes with reference to Matthew 28:18–20, which it

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[38] For details, see https://www.lausanne.org/gatherings/congress/cape-town-2010-3.

calls "the mandate," and the command to the disciples in John's Gospel to love one another, which is referred to as "the method" for mission, summed up as "*Make disciples. Love one another*" (italics original).[39] The concluding prayer is for "a reformation of biblical discipleship and a revolution of Christlike love."

The World Council of Churches' (WCC) statement on "mission and evangelism in changing landscapes"— *Together towards Life* (TTL)—is only the second such document in its history. It was the first to have an extended treatment of evangelism, which is understood as a call to discipleship (§§81, 83, 85) and as necessarily done in a way consistent with being disciples of Christ (§§81, 83). In keeping with the kenotic, costly ministry of Christ, discipleship does not support church growth at the expense of others (§§32, 62). Moreover, discipleship is communitarian: it is participation in an inclusive, reconciling church (§§10, 14). In this document, there is no direct reference to Matthew 28 but there are several references to Jesus' teaching on service in Matthew. Discipleship is interpreted as a "transformative spirituality" which is both authentic and missional (§§29–35).[40] Spirituality is understood as life in the Holy Spirit, as the motive for mission, and as a life-affirming gift from the creator that has "a dynamic of transformation" (§3). It is not

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[39] Arguably, these phrases should be the other way around; see Givens above.

[40] This part of TTL was informed by preparation for one of the study themes for Edinburgh 2010, the centenary project of the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh, 1910, on "mission spirituality and authentic discipleship," which was sourced especially from newer Christian movements especially in the majority world. See Daryl Balia and Kirsteen Kim, *Witnessing to Christ Today* (Oxford: Regnum, 2010) and Wonsuk Ma and Kenneth R. Ross, eds., *Mission Spirituality and Authentic Discipleship* (Oxford: Regnum, 2013). Both are available for free download at http://www.ocms.ac.uk/regnum/list.php?cat=3. The link forged here between discipleship and mission spirituality opens up discourse on spirituality which is similarly challenged to be more missional. Cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §§78–80.

individualistic but is resourced by worship and fellowship. Moreover, participating in mission, TTL claims we are "woven together" with the whole creation (§§21, 22, 74, 104). Discipleship is authentic because the means are consistent with the ends; that is, it is a way of life, a spirituality. It is missional by being prophetic and aiming at transformation by the power of the Spirit.

Evangelii Gaudium (EG), was the first authoritative document produced by Francis after he was elected pope earlier that year and it set an agenda of reformation. It re-worked the discussion of the previous year's synod of bishops on evangelization from an earnest and conservative attempt to re-evangelize Europe to an open, joyful, and "bruised, hurting and dirty" mission on the streets (§48).[41] Rather than justifying mission and evangelization on the basis of mystical encounter with Christ and sharing the gift of salvation, Pope Francis described it as "ministering to the wounded flesh of Christ in the world".[42] The main biblical support for this is Matt 25:31–46, where serving Christ is serving the poor and needy. Using this key, he interprets Matt 28:18–20 as a joyful "going forth" by the "community of missionary disciples" which responds to Christ's love by showing mercy and getting involved in people's lives in solidarity, endurance and sacrifice (§24). The disciples live as a loving community which is not "an exclusive and elite group" but a diverse community and "from all nations" (§§92, 99, 113). In EG (§120), Pope Francis coined the term "missionary disciples" in part to obviate the distinction between professional missionaries and ordinary Christians.[43] On the basis of Matt 28:19, he pointed out that all Christians become "missionary disciples" by their

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[41] For the background to EG, see Paul Grogan and Kirsteen Kim, eds., *The New Evangelization: Faith, People, Context and Practice* (London: T&T Clark, 2015).

[42] William Gregory, *Go Forth: Toward a Community of Missionary Disciples* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2019).

[43] As did Martin Luther; cf. Hardy, *Fabric of This World*, 51–52.

baptism (§§119–121; cf. 127, 266). For Francis, discipleship is "not merely about our personal relationship with God" but about the kingdom of heaven, including the life of society (§180), and the needs of the poor (§188).

All three of the above mission statements could be said to recover the missional nature of discipleship according to the Gospel of Matthew, to which we drew attention above. Building on TTL, the WCC conference on world mission and evangelism at Arusha, Tanzania in 2018[44] chose the theme "Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship" and planned the *Arusha Call to Discipleship* as a consensus document.[45] The leading Catholic missiologist, Stephen Bevans, who was one of the organizers of the Arusha conference, observed that there were three main ways of understanding "transforming discipleship" at Arusha: as a call to mission; as personal and community transformation; and as holistic transformation in the context of injustice, discrimination, and other evils.[46] Missional discipleship as a transformative spirituality manifested in an integral mission might be described as a consensus in mission emerging from EG, TTL and CTC.

Missional Discipleship for Formation in Theological Education

As we have seen, reading Matthew's Gospel from the back clarifies that discipleship – the response to the call of Christ, or vocation—is inherently missional, and that mission is the form of discipleship. To conclude, we will name some differences that this missional understanding of discipleship should make for

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[44] See https://www.oikoumene.org/en/mission2018.

[45] Kenneth R. Ross, "The Arusha Call: Signal of Missiological Convergence?" *International Review of Mission* 107.2 (2019): 452–56 and World Council of Churches, *Arusha Call to Discipleship* (2018), https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions /mission-and-evangelism/the-arusha-call-to-discipleship (accessed 5/16/19).

[46] Stephen B. Bevans, "Transforming Discipleship and the Future of Mission," *International Review of Mission* 107.2 (2019): 367.

formation in contemporary theological education.

First, since discipleship concerns not only our personal salvation but the kingdom of heaven, and since the kingdom is holistic and transformative—socially as well as personally—understanding discipleship involves social and political sciences as well as traditional theological disciplines and the humanities. Proclaiming the gospel requires accompanying action and a formation to be like the prophets, who were not afraid to question current practice and who discerned the signs of the times.

Second, if the gospel is for all nations, then theological education cannot be provincial but should encourage a global, intercultural, and interreligious outlook.[47] This applies not only to practical theology or missiology. It implies that biblical studies should teach biblical and hermeneutical diversity; that church history should tell the history of the world Christian movement; and that systematic theology should engage multiple philosophies—not only Western ones.[48] As in Galilee in Jesus's day, so even more in a globalized migrating world, theological education cannot assume that students are homogeneous and that their vocations will be to monocultural contexts or within their home community. Formation is not only for personal development or ministry in the church but for service of humanity and building a worldwide faith community.

Third, according to Matthew, in view of our baptism, we are all disciples in a diverse community and serve together in the kingdom. Students must be appraised of the insidious sin of racism and of the historical complicity with it of church, mission, and theology. They should be taught ways of recognizing and

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[47] See the chapter in this volume by Veli-Matti Kärkäinnen, "Vocation and Formation for the Religiously Pluralistic World."

[48] Orlando E. Costas, "Theological Education and Mission," *New Alternatives in Theological Education* (ed. C. René Padilla; Oxford: Regnum, 1988), 5–24.

dealing with racism.[49] Antisemitism is a particular form of racism that should be unthinkable in a church of Jew and Gentile together such as Matthew describes. If "being a Christian" is the disciple's "primary and formative loyalty," this will lead Christian solidarity to challenge nationalism, unjust immigration practices, government control of religion, and other abuses of the modern state.[50]

Lastly, in keeping with the teaching of Matthew's Gospel, theological and missiological education must promote ethical conduct, love of neighbor, and concern for the least. Such spirituality should be modeled within the mode of instruction and be central to formation practices.

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[49] Susan L. Maros, "'I'm Just American': Facilitating Seminary Students' Reflections Regarding the Impact of Whiteness on Vocational Formation," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 17 (2018): 68–89.

[50] Michael L. Budde, *The Borders of Baptism: Identities, Allegiances, and the Church* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011).

Call to a Life of Faithful Agility

The Practice of Learning to Love in 1 Corinthians and Beyond

W. Ryan Gutierrez

Rapid technological innovation coupled with economic disruptions has produced a situation where the rate of change has outpaced society's ability to adapt to these changes.[1] The world into which higher education institutions send their alumni will be drastically different than when they entered. These disruptions have forced institutions of higher education to reexamine critically the role knowledge plays in how students are formed to address challenges created by a rapidly changing world. For institutions like Fuller Theological Seminary that are committed to theological higher education, these disruptions and issues of student formation raise a theological question: how does God's revelation in Jesus Christ guide how students are formed to meet these unknown challenges? Asked another way, what kind of Christian formation is required to enable students to mobilize their academic learning to meet the unexpected challenges that await them and their communities after graduation? In response to these challenges and questions, the Vocation Formation (VF) Office at Fuller was created to help students develop the capacity to integrate their seminary education into a life of faithful discipleship.[2] The goal is to form students to reflect theologically

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[1] Thomas L. Friedman, *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations* (Reprint ed.; New York: Picador, 2017), 19–34.

[2] The issues of vocation and vocational discernment will need to be left underdeveloped in order to narrow the scope of the paper to one's formation in the right kind and right use of knowledge. I hope it becomes

on the challenges facing their communities and mobilize their academic learning to meet these challenges in explicitly Christian ways.

In this chapter, I will show that the formation of agile and faithful disciples requires a socially embedded way of knowing that produces stronger and more resilient relational bonds that enable individuals and communities to adapt to unknown disruptions and challenges. I use the term agile to describe the capacity to gather and make use of the appropriate resources in order to address the concerns and disruptions facing a community. While agility can be utilized with different ends in mind, I use the term faithful to orient agility toward those ends that align with God's call to obedient discipleship. What is envisioned, then, as the goal of a theologically reflective and socially embedded way of knowing is a faithful agility that enables students to adapt to disruptions in ways that align with the truth and power of the gospel.

I will first look at Paul's discussion of eating practices in 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1 in order to provide a theological account of knowledge that is produced by, in, and for the loving relationships created by God's call into the fellowship with Christ and Christ's members. As will become evident, knowledge should be directed toward a deeper knowing of one's community members in order to discern how to best care for one another across disruptive circumstances. Second, I will bring these theological insights to bear on a current curricular program at Fuller to show how a pedagogy around practices consistently

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clear in the following discussion that God's call into the fellowship of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:9) is a call for all Christians that entails coming to a knowledge of how to love the weak within one's own community amidst times of change and disruption. The formational processes developed by the Vocation Formation Office at Fuller are designed to help students discern how this general call takes shape in the particular contexts in which students are embedded.

connects learning with the cares and concerns of students' contexts. This practical formation produced by a socially embedded way of knowing develops the capacity to meet the unknown challenges and disruptions of the future.

Knowing How to Love and Care for Community Members: 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1

First Corinthians addresses a wide range of challenges faced by the Corinthian congregation. Throughout the letter, Paul is at pains to help certain Corinthians discern how their current knowledge has produced destructive practices that need to be transformed and patterned after God's self-giving love manifested in Christ crucified. [3] First Corinthians is therefore a great resource to understand the integral connection between knowledge and a community's ability to negotiate faithfully its life together amidst disruptions. After briefly looking at the opening of the letter to view knowledge as a programmatic concept, I will explore Paul's discussion of eating practices in 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1 to show a concrete example of how Paul argues for knowledge to be used to build a community up in love.

In the opening address of 1 Corinthians, Paul brings together knowledge and the intimate fellowship that characterizes the community's life and identity. Paul names knowledge as one of the gifts with which God has enriched the Corinthians as they await the revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:5–7). These gifts are given to the Corinthians as those who have been "called into the fellowship of [God's] Son, Jesus Christ our

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[3] There is much debate about whether First Corinthians should be viewed as addressing a single issue, multiple related issues, or multiple unrelated issues. For a review of these possibilities, as well as an argument for their unity which the present chapter follows, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 607–12.

Lord" (1:9).[4] To be called into fellowship with Jesus Christ is also to be called into fellowship with all those whom God has called. God's call situates the Corinthians within a network of relationships; they are intimately related to Christ Jesus, to one another as the church in Corinth, and to other churches who also call on the name of the Lord in their own respective places.[5] Knowledge, then, is identified at the beginning of the letter as a central concept and is intimately connected with its function to sustain the fellowship of the community.

As becomes quickly evident, however, knowledge is not sustaining the community but has produced divisions that span across various practices like baptism (1:10–16), sexuality (5–7), eating (8–10), and worship (11–14). Throughout each of these sections, Paul employs sayings from the Corinthians as entry points to discuss the relationship between their knowledge and the current practices that are tearing apart its life together.[6] It is pertinent to look closely at Paul's exhortations around the community's eating practices since he opens this section with a discussion of knowledge. In 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1, Paul addresses certain Corinthians who claim to possess knowledge that justifies eating food that has been sacrificed to idols; some of these Corinthians have gone so far as to eat food in temples (cf. 8:10). These indiscriminate eating practices are justified by the following sayings of some members of the Corinthian

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[4] All Scripture citations are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

[5] As Richard Hays says, "To be 'in Christ' is to be in the fellowship of the church. The community's calling is not just to perform a mission or to obey certain norms; rather, the community is finally called into a relationship of intimate mutuality with one another in Christ." Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 19.

[6] Though the exact number of these quotations is debated, a conservative representation of the quotations can be found in the following list: 1:12, 4:8, 6:12–13; 7:1; 8:1, 4, 8; 10:23; 15:12.

community:

> "All of us possess knowledge'" (8:1).
>
> "No idol in the world really exists," and "there is no God but one" (8:4).
>
> "Food will not bring us close to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do." (8:8).[7]

For those who claim to possess such knowledge about God, idols, and food, eating food sacrificed to idols should not cause any concern. One could hear these Corinthians say, "Eat whatever food you want, even if it's inside the temple of an idol! Idols are not real and food does not affect our relationship with God." But such a posture assumes that knowledge and even one's relationship to God are isolated realities that an individual subject can have as a possession *apart* from the life of the community. Paul points to the other community members with weak consciences who are being destroyed by the eating practices of these Corinthians in order to resituate knowledge as integrally tied to the relationships of the community (8:11).[8] Paul's primary issue

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[7] While there is agreement that Paul is quoting Corinthian sayings in 1 Cor 8:1 and 4, there is no consensus on the exact scope of these quotations. In addition, there is less agreement on whether Paul is quoting the Corinthians in 8:8 or presenting his own views. For the present chapter, I take Paul's use of the first person plural that is subsequently followed by second or third person address to indicate when he is quoting the Corinthians. For a detailed review of the available options, see Paul Gardner, *1 Corinthians* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 367–68. For a detailed discussion on 1 Cor 8:8, see Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Food and Spiritual Gifts in 1 Cor 8:8," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41.2 (April 1979): 292–98.

[8] Conscience (*syneidēsis*) is a difficult word to translate. For the purpose of this paper, it is not important to have a precise definition of conscience, but to understand how someone can come to the knowledge of another person's conscience in a way that informs the practices in a community. For both a definition of conscience and an exposition of its relational function in these chapters, see Paul W. Gooch, "'Conscience' in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10," *New Testament Studies* 33.2 (April 1987): 244–

with knowledge as a possession is that this way of knowing separates both knowledge and the possessor of knowledge from their proper function within the community.[9] Knowledge is no longer a gift *received* from God that is used to build up the fellowship of the church, but becomes something that is *possessively owned* and used however one pleases without attention to its impact on others in the community. The Corinthian perspective on knowledge makes the possessor of knowledge blind to other community members, and therefore promotes a destructive mode of relating to these members.

Knowledge used in this possessive manner can make a "true" statement false. For example, the knowledge that "there is no God but one" should produce a oneness in the community, not tear it apart. There is, then, a right way to receive and use knowledge that is connected to the life of the community. In contrast to this possessive account of knowledge that puffs up, Paul argues for love that builds up the community (8:1b). Knowledge that is produced by and for the building up of a community is a truthful knowing in that it aligns the content and function of knowledge to its proper use. For the Corinthians to know differently requires them to love differently, to attend lovingly to the weak consciences of others in the community in relation to practices produced by their knowledge. Such a love is

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54 and Brian Brock and Bernd Wannenwetsch, *The Malady of the Christian Body: A Theological Exposition of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 1: 170–89.

[9] Opposing scholars who view Paul making a distinction between theory and practice in his use of knowledge (*gnōsis*), Gardner argues that knowledge is always practical and functions in a particular way in a community's life. Therefore, Paul's purpose and the exegete's goal is to determine the divisive function that knowledge has played in Corinth and how Paul prescribes a new function for knowledge according to love that builds up the community. Paul Gardner, *The Gifts of God and the Authentication of a Christian: An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 8–11:1* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 23–27.

what drives Paul's claim to never eat meat again if it causes another community member to stumble (8:13).

Knowledge that is produced by and for a loving relationship is patterned after God's love and knowledge of humanity. God's love is revealed in God's presence with God's people in Christ who was the rock that provided spiritual drink to the Israelites in the wilderness (10:4) and who continues to be present to those called into fellowship with him through the weekly performance of the Lord's Supper (10:16; cf. 11:17–34). The Lord's Supper proclaims Jesus's death and, in this way, reveals God's willingness to intimately know human weakness in death (cf. 11:26). The revelation of Christ crucified is why Paul can claim that "anyone who loves God is known by [God]" (8:3). In addition to God's knowledge of humanity, the Lord's Supper is also God's invitation to be known by humanity as it is in this meal that humanity is drawn into the loving mutuality of Christ's own life (10:16).

To participate in Christ's way of knowing requires a knowledge that does not separate oneself from other community members, but that intimately unites members together so that the community comes to a greater knowledge of how to love one another in specific instances of disruption and conflict.[10] To love and know in a way that is patterned after Christ commits a person to a way of knowing oneself in relation to others and of being known by others.[11] This is precisely how we should understand

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[10] It is possible to see socioeconomic disparities within this discussion of eating meat sacrificed to idols since meat is an expensive food product that would not be readily available to poor member of the community. For an analysis of chapters 8–10 in light socioeconomic realities, see Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (tr. John Howard Schütz; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 125–29.

[11] Parker Palmer indicates something similar in the quest for truth. He says, "Not only do I invest my own personhood in truth and the quest for truth, but truth invests itself personally in me and the quest

Paul's exposition of his missionary practice, "For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all . . . I have become all things to all people" (9:19a, 22a). Far from an individual act of the will that allows Paul to transform himself into a kind of social chameleon, Paul participates in the communities to which God has called him in ways that enable these communities to truly know and transform who Paul is. Paul's missionary practice is "a process of discovery and exploration, of coming to terms with what the gospel will reveal about him and those to whom he preaches as it binds them to each other."[12] It therefore reveals that knowledge of oneself and a community is not a stable entity that can be acted upon in the same way across time, but is something that must be continually *discerned* by participating within the complex set of religious, political, and economic institutions that constitute life in a given place.

Paul provides a concrete example of the kind of discernment required in this relational way of knowing in the scenario of some church members who are invited to eat in the house of a non-believer (10:27–29). Paul says church members can eat whatever is provided when hosted by a non-believer without raising any questions of conscience. However, if the host informs the believing guests that the food has been sacrificed to idols, then they are to abstain from eating both for the sake of the host and for the sake of the conscience of other believers around the table. Should one of the Corinthians who possesses knowledge eat the food sacrificed to idols, then the other congregation members who

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from me. 'Truth is personal' means not only that the knower's person becomes part of the equation, but that the personhood of the known enters the relation as well. The known seeks to know me even as I seek to know it; such is the logic of love." Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (Reprint ed.; San Francisco: HarperOne, 2010), 58.

[12] Brock and Wannenwetsch, *Malady*, 1: 211.

are present and who have weak consciences would be put in the difficult position either to refuse the food and make the church's division visible to the non-believing host, or accept the food and be destroyed by participating in an activity that violates their conscience. Instead, Paul advocates for the "knowledgeable" Corinthians, who in love have come to know the conscience of their other members, to act in solidarity with these members and refuse to eat the provided food.[13] In this way, should there be any social or economic consequences for refusing to eat the food, these consequences will be shared throughout the community. To share one another's burdens in this way is how the Corinthian community gives glory to God (10:31) and imitates Paul as Paul imitates Christ (11:1).

Although it might seem as if the preceding discussion has taken us a long way from our initial inquiry around the disruptions facing graduates of theological higher education, we are not as far away as it may appear. The question I am seeking to answer is how are people formed to respond to disruptions affecting a community's life in ways that are agile *and* faithful. The above discussion has revealed Paul's efforts to resolve a particular disruption around eating practices and to form the Corinthian community into a particular way of knowing that would allow for continual discernment of how to remain faithful to one another when new disruptions occur.

Paul's exhortation reveals the socially embedded and relational nature of knowledge that is produced by, in, and for the

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[13] This scenario is a concrete example of Paul's admonition for the community to examine themselves (11:28), to discern the body (11:29), and to receive one another (11:33) in order to reorganize the Lord's Supper around the economically poor and vulnerable. For an exposition of how the Lord's Supper should function as a formative practice within the Corinthian community, see Michael Rhodes, "'Forward unto Virtue': Formative Practices and I Corinthians 11:17–34," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 11.1 (2017): 119–38.

loving relationships created by God's call into the fellowship with Christ and Christ's members.[14] Patterned after Christ's own loving knowledge of humanity, the community continually grows in the knowledge of how to love other community members. Discernment becomes necessary in order to determine how, at different times and in different situations, the community needs to leverage the knowledge of its weak members in ways that change its practices for the good of all. Through this discernment that enables reciprocal care for one another, the community's relational bonds are built up, which in turn enables deeper levels of discernment and care within the community; the community increases its knowledge of how to relate to one another lovingly in new and challenging circumstances. The building up of the community's relational bonds will also enable a sympathetic connection to other members of Christ's body so that "[i]f one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." (12:26).[15] Therefore, a community will be able to respond faster when a new disruption negatively effects its community members.

Practices that Form Our Knowing: A Curricular Test Case

I will now turn my attention to a recent revision of Fuller's Theology and Intercultural Studies Master's programs in order to provide one example of how a seminary education can engage in the formation of its students. The theological analysis of knowledge gleaned from First Corinthians will be used to deepen

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[14] This claim is similar to Esther Lightcap Meek who proposes that "we take as a paradigm of all knowing the interpersoned, covenantally constituted relationship." Esther Lightcap Meek, *Loving to Know: Covenant Epistemology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 45.

[15] For an excellent essay that unpacks the communicative elements of Paul's body metaphor, see Brian Brock, "Theologizing Inclusion: 1 Corinthians 12 and the Politics of the Body of Christ," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 15.4 (October 2011): 351–76.

and enrich the articulation of this formational process.

The curricular revision created four Integrative Studies (IS) courses designed to help students integrate their academic learning in relationship to the central practices of the Christian life. The IS courses utilize *practices* as the pedagogical form to connect student learning with their communal contexts in order to create significant learning experiences that increase their ability to integrate their learning into a meaningful life.[16] A focus on practices helps students avoid the trap of viewing the knowledge they gain in seminary as something to be possessed in isolation from their communities. Instead, practices provide a form to allow students' communal contexts to mutually inform and enrich their academic learning in ways that allow what is learned to be received by the community in a manner that builds it up in love. Following Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, practices can be defined as "things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world in Jesus Christ."[17] Practices by their very nature are embodied and embedded activities that are enacted in specific places and times.[18] In this

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[16] L. Dee Fink, *Creating Significant Learning Experiences: An Integrated Approach to Designing College Courses* (2nd ed.; San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 7.

[17] Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 18.

[18] Embodied and embedded cognition is a field in cognitive neuroscience that understands an integral connection between how humans know and are formed overtime, with their embodied selves as embedded within overlapping social networks. For a brief article explaining this kind of cognition, see Warren S. Brown, "Knowing Ourselves as Embodied, Embedded, and Relationally Extended," *Zygon: Journal of Religion & Science* 52.3 (September 2017): 864–79. For a book length discussion on how embodied and embedded cognition should inform the formation of churches, see Warren S. Brown and Brad D.

way, practices and theological reflection on a community's engagement with particular practices provide a way of knowing that is intimately connected to a community's life together. They provide a way of growing in the knowledge of the relationships of a community, learning about the fundamental needs of the people in that community, and discerning God's intimate presence within these relationships across time.

A central component in the formation process is to engage students in embodied activities around practices, and not just learn about a practice in abstraction from their own personal and communal engagement with a practice. Throughout the four IS courses, students will engage various Christian practices through embodied, intellectual, and contemplative activities that are oriented toward helping students discern a set of practices that will sustain them and their communities in the midst of challenging circumstances. The practice of hospitality can serve as an example of how this process works. Students participate in the following activities: (1) reflect on their current understanding and performance of hospitality, (2) engage in academic learning about hospitality through readings and lectures, (3) embody hospitality in a discipline within their embedded communities (e.g., hosting community members around a meal), and (4) utilize contemplative prayer practices in a mentor-led Vocation Formation (VF) group in order to discern how God is inviting them to integrate the embodied and intellectual learning of hospitality into future action in their personal and communal lives.

Throughout this formation process, students are not objective observers who stand at a critical distance from knowledge but are implicated and central to the learning process. Through embodying and reflecting on the practice of hospitality,

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Strawn, *The Physical Nature of Christian Life: Neuroscience, Psychology, and the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

students come to a deeper understanding of themselves in relation to others. They learn to identify the fundamental needs of their community members and begin to discern how their community does or does not welcome one another in life-giving ways that promote an equitable sharing throughout the community. Students also learn about their own participation in relating to members of their community, either through the healthy patterns of welcome or unhealthy patterns of exclusion.[19] Finally, students grow into a deeper understanding of God who in Christ has created and redeemed God's creation in order to bring all that is into the loving mutuality of God's own life. A focus on practices situates knowledge within the human and divine relationships that form and shape students. Having students engage in and reflect on practices enables them to know their communities and God while simultaneously opening up their own lives to be known by their community members.

Central to this process are the mentor-led VF groups that are spaces for students to process their engagement in this embodied and personal way of knowing in order to discern God's invitation to integrate the experiences from the formational process into concrete personal and communal disciplines. Through contemplative prayer disciplines like the Prayer of Examen or Lectio Divina, students are able to bring the fears and hopes generated by the course activities before God in prayer. Emotional and visceral responses to the academic learning and

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[19] A primary way these courses help students identify their participation in healthy or unhealthy ways of relating is through reflection on their social location. One's participation in a practice and its impact on a community is largely determined by the social location of both the practitioner and the others within the community. For a detailed example of how reflection on social location takes places in one of these IS courses, see Susan L Maros, "'I'm Just American': Facilitating Seminary Students' Reflections Regarding the Impact of Whiteness on Vocational Formation," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 17 (Fall 2018): 68–89.

embodied activities become critical points for reflection and deeper learning. A mentor-led small group experience provides a context for processing these emotional and visceral responses with other students in ways that help students identify areas of growth. The contemplative prayer disciplines allow students to attend to God's presence in these embodied responses and discern how God might be inviting students to take the next step toward integrating a practice into their life of discipleship. A key tool to aid in this discernment process is the development of a rule of life, which students create or update at the end of each IS course. A rule of life can be define as a "holistic description of the Spirit-empowered rhythms and relationships that create, redeem, sustain and transform the life God invites [a person] to humbly fulfill for Christ's glory."[20] A student's rule of life is designed to gather up the knowledge gained about herself and her community in order to and identify what practices will sustain and strengthen these relational bonds based on present challenges or areas for growth. A student's rule of life is meant to be a dynamic and not static tool, responsive to a deeper knowledge of one's self and relationships that is gained through the embodied, intellectual, and contemplative activities around Christian practices.

The practice-based model of learning illustrated around the practice of hospitality helps students build the capacity to properly identify the personal and communal forces that have shaped their current formation and engage the necessary resources to embody new and faithful practices. The end goal of this process is vocational agility, the capacity for a student to gather and make use of practices, learning, and relationships throughout her life in order to address the concerns and disruptions facing her community. It is the ability properly to

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[20] Stephen A. Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life: An Invitation to the Well-Ordered Way* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 14.

identify a change in one's context, lived reality, or stage in one's life, reflect on what is required to remain faithful in light of these changing circumstances, and gather the necessary resources to implement these changes. As discussed briefly in the first section, it is impossible to predict what kind of disruptions will occur throughout a student's life both within seminary and beyond. What is crucial is for students to have the capacity to reflect on their current circumstances, discern how these circumstances impact the members of their community, and adapt their current practices in order to love and care for one another in continual witness to their call of fellowship. It is this kind of knowledge — the ability to construct, enact, and adapt a rule of life in ways that strengthen the relational bonds of a community — that provides the context for students to integrate their seminary education into a life of faithful discipleship after they graduate.

Conclusion

In this paper, I argued that the formation of agile and faithful disciples requires a socially embedded way of knowing that situates what we know and how we know within the relationships that constitute our lives. The discussion on eating practices in 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1 provided a theological account for this way of knowing. It revealed the socially embedded and relational nature of knowledge that is produced by, in, and for the loving relationships created by God's call into the fellowship with Christ and Christ's members. Patterned after Christ's own loving knowledge of humanity, the community grows in the knowledge of other community members in order to love and care for one another. I then discussed a current curricular revision that utilizes *practices* as the pedagogical form to connect student learning with their communal contexts. Student engagement with and reflection on practices provide a way of growing in the knowledge of the relationships of a community, learning about the fundamental needs of the people in that community, and discerning God's

intimate presence within these relationships across time. In both of these discussions, discernment is a key step to determine how, at different times and situations, this socially embedded knowledge should be leveraged in order to adapt one's practices to care for those most affected during times of disruption and rapid change. To be formed into this socially embedded way of knowing produces stronger and more resilient relational bonds that enable individuals and communities to faithfully adapt to unknown disruptions and challenges over the course of a lifetime.

Part II
Global/Theological Perspectives

Moral Formation and Vocation

A Covenantal Perspective

Hak Joon Lee

Vocation has its theological origins in the West, as indicated by its etymology, *vocatio* (God's call, or God's voice). Protestant Christianity has developed a rich tradition of vocation starting with Martin Luther, a leader of the Reformation. The idea that each person has a lifelong special calling, an assigned task, from God—work that is more than economic subsistence but for the common good and God's glory—has tremendously contributed to the shaping of modern civilization, especially the rise of professionalism and professional ethics. Unfortunately, this theological underpinning of vocation has largely disappeared in contemporary culture. Like other theologically informed ideas, "vocation" has been secularized to the extent that it no longer connotes any religious or transcendental significance at all.[1]

There are many signs that this now-secular concept is losing its moral meaning and sense of public responsibility. People are increasingly disinterested in the importance, meaning, and implications of their work for the common life. However, this does not mean that the idea of "vocation" has completely lost its cultural relevance. There are numerous young people who want to find meaning and purpose of their lives through work, even if they do not articulate this desire in religious language. Under the

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[1] Kathleen A. Cahalan, "Introduction: Finding Life's Purpose in God's Purpose," *Calling All Years Good: Christian Vocation throughout Life's Season* (eds. Kathleen A. Cahalan and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 4.

influence of expressive individualism and utilitarian emotive cultural milieu, people care not so much for public responsibility as for vocation understood to be the opportunity of self-construction and self-fulfillment.

As we will soon discuss, the shift in the cultural view of vocation not only relates to the receding of the cultural force of Christianity, but also a major economic transformation and the rise of the postmodern culture, a characteristic of which is expressive individualism. The changed nature of work and cultural attitude calls for the renewed and revised understanding of vocation.

Thus, we ask: What is the meaning and significance of vocation at a time of disappearing full-time employment, an insecure labor market, and a high job turnover rate? How should churches teach their members about the meaning and significance of vocation? Is the idea of vocation inseparable from a full-time job? Is the Christian idea of vocation still relevant in a globalizing, job-gutting, highly mobile, individualistic society? What can the Church offer in response to people's search for meaning and purpose in life?

This chapter proposes a covenantal basis of vocation with a focus on its moral aspect. I claim that a moral dimension is critical for any idea of vocation, and a covenantal approach addresses this dimension, effectively countervailing the current individualistic and existentialized cultural view of vocation today. In particular, I examine how the biblical idea of covenant can guide the vocational formation of young people in such a way that their sense of identity is clarified, their virtue formation is facilitated, and their sense of public responsibility is both awakened and deepened.

A Secular Culture's Approach to Vocation

Before we study a covenantal approach to vocation, I first want to examine how and why the modern idea of vocation has

lost its moral dimension and why it raises a pressing moral concern today.

When we think of vocation, we immediately think of a full-time job or occupation—something that we do to make a living. In a post-Christian era, not many people in the West are aware of that the idea of vocation has a Christian origin.

(1) The cultural view of vocation has quite dramatically changed over the past several decades, especially among Millennials and Generation Z, with the shift of the economy from a manufacturing to an information-centered one. Such a shift was prompted by the effects of increasing globalization, especially the outsourcing of jobs, and the advancement of technologies (communication, robotics, AI). Lifelong employment and maintaining the same occupation at the same company is a long-gone memory. Our profession is no longer something that occupies us throughout our lifetime. Even with a college diploma, it is difficult to find a decent full-time job. Outsourcing and automation of jobs have replaced human workers in the West. According to a 2019 report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), individuals in the US experience an average of 12–14 job transitions in their lifetime, changing their workplace every 3 or 4 years, with young workers (ages 25 to 34) experiencing an even shorter average job duration (2.8 years).[2] This altered nature of work (as unstable, fragmented, and ever-evolving) makes individuals feel insecure and pressured to be self-protective to avoid job insecurity, and thus are unable to seek moral meaning or public importance in their work.

(2) Together with the structural changes in the job market, the cultural transformation we know as postmodernity has also

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[2] Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Number of Jobs, Labor Market Experience, and Earnings Growth: Results from a National Longitudinal Survey," Bureau of Labor Statistics (August 22, 2019): https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/nlsoy.pdf (accessed 12/12/19).

reshaped one's idea of work; one's sense of vocation has become more individualistic than communal.[3]

Postmodernity has changed the reference point for one's meaning and purpose in life—from the grand purpose of history, moral cause, humility before life's mystery, and divine work to self-fulfillment, success, and wealth. Many emerging adults delay their commitment to full-time employment until they find jobs that gratify them. They tend to be individualistic and self-expressive; they are deeply concerned about happiness and meaning in their lives. Being more preoccupied with their success and happiness than any previous generations, they are willing to give up job securities and they refuse to settle in anywhere until they find what they truly want.

The search for purpose and meaning in life is very individualized, self-constructive, and lacking a public perspective. People seek individual comfort, security, and pleasure increasingly at the disregard of or indifference to the suffering of the world. Their personal desires and professional ambition are preoccupied with their private well-being.[4] In seeking the meaning and purpose of their lives through work, they do not think of it as something transcending themselves. Vocation is understood completely within "an immanent frame," if I use Charles Taylor's phrase. These trends are, of course, not unique to Millennials and Generation Z, but traceable to Generation X and the Baby Boomers as well. However, they have become far more prominent and pervasive among younger

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[3] This secular understanding of vocation is based on a modern view of a moral agency—an individual as a self-sufficient and autonomous being. However, this premise is wrong because people can neither be fully human nor fulfill themselves outside of their relationships with others.

[4] David Setran and Chris Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 114.

generations.

(3) In a close association with individualism, one cannot disregard the impact of widespread hedonism (pleasure seeking) on our attitude toward work in a capitalist material culture. A cultural view of vocation is also shaped by the materialistic nature of capitalist society—professional success and career advancement is typically measured by salary, benefits, and bonuses, rather than contribution to the public. Hard work and successful career are expected to receive the rewards of money and the materialistic pleasure that money can buy (luxury home, car, amenities). More and more people are less interested in jobs in the public sector and/or public service. Pleasure seeking and self-gratification are typically short-term, highly self-oriented, and less other-oriented. Vocational practices do not go beyond the boundaries of a contract with employers. In the process, there is a temptation to compromise one's core moral principles related to a job if it profits one's career and/or one's company. Moral concerns are deferred to someone else. A general attitude is: "It is not my business." Personal success and monetary gain, clearly a profit motive, are frequently pursued at the expense of a community, public interest, planetary well-being, and even the rights of others.

The confluence of these desires (i.e., for economic security, personal fulfillment, and pleasure) has substantially changed the very idea of vocation, creating "anxiety, paralysis, a lack of vocational commitment and contentment" among many individuals.[5] It has made the responsibility toward others a secondary or non-concern in one's consideration of vocation.

A Critique of a Cultural Trend

An individual existential sense of vocation should not be disregarded because vocation constitutes an important aspect of

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[5] Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation*, 113.

one's identity: Who am I? What am I supposed to do? What is the meaning of my life? However, vocational formation that lacks a moral dimension is dangerous. It creates an expert and skillful professional without any public responsibility. Such professionals may have terminal degrees, professional knowledge, and skills, but no sense of purpose other than self-fulfillment and career advancement.

One may be very successful in one's job but may be harmful to the public because everything is done for the wrong reasons. We see such an example in the story of Joseph (Gen 47:13–26) under the Pharaoh. During the famine he performed his task efficiently for the Pharaoh, but not for people nor for God's shalom. In fact, using his business skills, Joseph completely ruined their economic stability and quality of life. In fact, they were forced to sell their lands and themselves as slaves to the Pharaoh. He undermined God's shalom and contributed to the Pharaoh's concentration of power and resources, strengthening his autocratic regime. Professionally Joseph was an excellent prime minister, but morally he was a terrible leader for the people of Egypt.

Without moral formation corresponding to professional development, professions may not be productive or sustainable over the long term. In our society there are numerous success stories of self-fulfillment, but our public life is deeply impoverished, and public trust in politicians, professionals, corporate managers, government officials, and bureaucrats is radically declining.

When this public moral dimension disappears from one's sense of vocation—in other words, when one's work is oriented solely toward money making or institutional productivity—then the result can be devastating for the public, especially those who are poor, marginalized, and weak. A series of financial scandals (e.g., Enron, the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis) were the result of the erosion of a moral dimension from business managers, Wall

Street financiers, loan officers, bankers, etc. Similarly, the Iraqi War in 2003 was based on shaky information, the result of the complicit acquiescence of the CIA Director and officers to the political pressure from the Neo-Cons for their global hegemonic agenda. We increasingly find numerous examples around us, including newspaper reporters willing to cook the data for their stories and automotive companies hiding safety information from customers for their own profit. The result is a rising public distrust of politicians and professionals.

Vocation cannot be completely personalized or privatized; it always includes a moral dimension and a public responsibility. Vocation is more than personal fulfillment; achieving self-actualization through a job does not necessarily mean that one has performed one's vocation morally. Vocation is also more than competently fulfilling a job description. Good performance of vocation requires not only professional competence (intelligence and skills) but also commitment and responsibility toward the common good.

In each kind of work, there is a moral dimension that extends more deeply and broadly than one's personal meaning. To find a vocation is to find not only a personal meaning but also a mandate (public task) intrinsic to work. Where does this sense of public responsibility come from? As we will discuss later, it stems from the covenantal nature of human relationships. That is, a vocation is specific and internal to the nature of work and the covenantal relationships surrounding it. For example, my vocation as a seminary professor is immediately specific to my relationship to my students, an academic guild, and a seminary administration, among others. In general, I find in my teaching the fulfilling meaning of my life as well as a holy sense of responsibility in my work.

A Covenantal Approach to Vocation

Although Scripture has diverse references to covenant, the

divine-human covenant, in general, refers to a discursive mechanism, a communicative process, through which God and human partners enter into an enduring relationship through the exchange of promises and allegiances.[6] The divine-human covenant is typically based on God's initiating grace—God's act of deliverance or promise of extraordinary blessings, like a royal grant. The human response is marked by both gratitude and a commitment to the covenant offered by God.

Covenant, Christian identity, and vocation are inextricably associated in Christian faith. First, a covenantal relationship is the foundation of Christian identity. Our personal identity is largely the result of our interaction with significant others of our lives. In general, identity refers to the enduring sense of self ("who I am"), either discovered or developed over a long period of time. According to William Spohn, "Identity names that which stays the same in the stream of consciousness, the continuity to a personal history. Although never fully articulated it is the basic 'sense' of who we are. It is the horizon of our uniqueness, but curiously it is not individualistic."[7]

Covenant offers a structure and context through which identity is discovered and moral agency is shaped and matured. Entering a covenant with God is to belong to God; it is a process of obtaining a new identity as a child of God and discovering a new meaning and purpose in life.[8] This new identity in God

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[6] Covenant or similar concepts are found in many different societies and languages: *pactum* and *compactum* (Latin), *aliance* and *contrat* (French), and *Bund* (German). The rich vocabularies testify the pervasiveness of the idea in human social life in general. See Max L. Stackhouse, *Covenant and Commitments: Faith, Family and Economic Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 143.

[7] William Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 24.

[8] Michael Horton says: "Nowhere in Scripture is the question of human identity asked or answered in the abstract, but only in terms of the covenantal—which is to say, ethical—commission that takes an

grants a person a sense of self-worth, coherence, integration, unity, and purpose. In her newly found identity, a believer is assured of her worth and sanctity.[9] While often misused in history for distorted political purposes, the idea of election tells the depth of Christian identity and strength of the bond between God and a believer.[10] The tie between identity and election explains why it has such an attractive power in Christian history. To be elected means to be known, recognized, and chosen regardless of one's merits or failings.

Second, vocation is a significant aspect of our personal identity that we find in a covenantal relationship with God and others. In the covenant, we discover not only who we are but also what we are born to do.[11] Covenant typically begins with a call,

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explicitly narrative construction." Michael Horton, "Image and Office," *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective* (eds. Richard Lints, Michael S. Horton, and Mark R. Talbot; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 198.

[9] Personal identity is covenantally constituted in relation to God, other human beings, and the non-human creation. When these relationships (or the community where these relationships are embedded) lose their covenantal quality (meaning broken or under-developed), a person's identity development could be impaired or stalled.

[10] The idea of election may raise a deep concern among some people because of its abuses to justify racism and ethnocentrism by white Christians (the tendency is also still found among extremist religious Jewish settlers in Israel). To associate election with covenant is not misguided; however, applying this idea to a specific race, gender, tribe, ethnic group or nation at the expense of others is a gross violation of the nature of covenant. Paul declared that there are no Jews or Gentiles in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:28). By expanding its membership (election) to the entire humanity, with faith as its only requirement, the New Covenant of Jesus clearly repudiates any possible exclusivism related to election. Karl Barth made a huge theological contribution by redefining election as God's free decision to love humanity in Jesus Christ from eternity. Jesus Christ is both the God who elects and humanity who is elected simultaneously.

[11] This calling and mission is not something added after entering the covenant relationship. They are embedded in God's election of

which then issues forth a sense of vocation: "God initiates the covenant with a call."[12] God's call in the covenant includes God's promise and invitation to a certain task (e.g., Gen 12:1–3; Exod 19:3–6). Vocation is the aspect of "task" that we receive as we enter a covenantal relationship with God. In summary, Christian identity is constituted relationally and vocationally by God's election and call, and the two are inseparable.[13]

The discovery of identity and task in covenantal relationship means that vocation is simultaneously both personal and public. Vocation is very highly personal, unique to oneself; it cannot be publicly tested or proven. God's call is God's communication to us in a very personal form. Every call from God is concrete and particular. The one who calls each one of us is the one who knows us personally. The sense of vocation emerges when we freely respond to God's call.[14] In a covenantal understanding, calling is to discover who I am in God's plan and purpose. It is intimate and personal as it offers answers to the questions of "Who am I, why am I here? How is my life is related to the others and the world? What are our lives in this world about? What are we to make out of our lives?"[15]

In the covenant we find that we are claimed and owned by

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humanity in Jesus Christ from the beginning. It is believed that one's election precedes calling. Paul declares: "And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rom 8:30). Identity arises when God elects and calls. Together they constitute the foundation of one's religious identity.

[12] Douglas J. Schuurman, *Vocation: Discerning Our Callings in Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 19.

[13] This explains why even a secularized idea of vocation is so closely tied to a personal identity.

[14] For Christians, vocation begins with God's call but it is also equally the exercise of one's freedom. Based on the free decision of a person, freedom is presupposed for any responsible self-direction.

[15] Mark Labberton, *Called: The Crisis and Promise of Following Jesus Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 17.

God for God's purpose; we discover the true purpose of our life in the covenantal relationship with God: "You are my son" (Ps 2:7); "You will be a blessing" (Gen 12:2). The person finds that her faith is larger than her own life and interest; her horizon begins to take a universal, but not abstract, nature because her Lord is the Lord of the universe.

The sense of call, however, does not have to be supernatural, heard directly from God; it may gradually emerge or be discovered through a long process of self-reflection, spiritual direction, and communal discernment. What is important is the enduring sense of urging, pressing, excitement and passion, which Jeremiah called "in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones" (Jer 20:9). Vocation is personally experienced as a voice that is consistently urging and pressing and exciting us, a voice that stays with us.

Response to God's call (and discovery of one's vocational identity) is not a one-time event or performance; it is an ongoing process of discernment, and thus contextual by nature. Vocation is more than resume. Vocation is a process and development rather than the finalized form. Vocation is personally experienced as a voice that is consistently urging, pressing, and exciting, a voice that stays with us. There always is a room to grow for a person and an institution to rediscover and refine God's calling in their faith journey. It is a narrative, always embedded in a person's biography!

The covenantal context of vocation is also moral in nature. Where does this moral nature come from? The process of covenanting inevitably includes a moral dimension because entering a covenant constitutes a moral relationship and organizes it according to the principles of justice (fairness and equity through the delineation of respective rights and duties). To enter a covenant is to "put things right" in relationship. This justice dimension is institutionalized, we may say coded, in the agreement reached through the exchange of claims. That is, this

agreement is both contextual and public. Covenanted parties have a responsibility to abide by the covenantal stipulation they have agreed to.

Vocation is moral because of its missional and public nature. Entering a covenantal relationship with God in baptism also entails entering a moral and missional life. Christians become public and missional when they are baptized. It is an initiation ceremony of covenant in which the baptized make public denouncement of their selfish ambitions and desires, and commit themselves to the teachings of Scripture and the Church, and to the cause of God's kingdom. Our calling and mission are driven by a sense of gratitude to God's love.

To respond to the call is to participate in God's own mission and purpose in solidarity with the suffering of the world. In pursuing the mission, God and human beings become coworkers and partners. It is not merely for the salvation of the souls, but also for restoration and renewal of creation. For example, Noah's call was public to the extent that it included other creatures in the Ark; Abraham's and Sarah's call was inclusive and public, as it was to bless all the families of the earth. Likewise, from the very beginning of their covenant with God, Israel understood itself as the priestly kingdom, called out by God for a divine purpose of repairing the creation (Exod 19:4–6).[16] In the New Testament, the mission has a cosmic scope in the eschatological context of the New Covenant. Jesus called his disciples to be light and salt in the world — these metaphors

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[16] On the missional nature of the covenant, Walter Brueggemann sums up: "The three belong closely together: a *God* who makes covenant by making a move toward the partner (Hos. 2:14, 18-20); a *community* that practices covenant by the new forms of torah, knowledge, and forgiveness (Jer. 31:31-34); and a *world* yet to be transformed to covenanting, by the dismantling of imperial reality (Isa. 42:6-7; 49:6)." Walter Brueggemann, *A Social Reading of the Old Testament: Prophetic Approaches to Israel's Communal Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 53 (emphasis original).

resonate with the Deuteronomistic vision of the priestly kingdom. We see numerous other examples throughout the Bible.

A General Sense of Vocation: One God and Multiple Vocations

While a narrow sense of vocation is concerned with one's occupation or profession, a broad sense of vocation is related to every domain of social relationship in which one finds oneself because vocation has to do with a relational task. It is associated with our identity.

Vocation cannot be reduced to daily full-time work, even though doing a job well is an important aspect of vocation; it applies to every sphere of our social life (in every stage of our life). That is, we carry out multiple vocations simultaneously, even before getting a full-time job and after our retirement. Just as our identity is multifaceted, so is our sense of vocation. Covenant ethics takes every realm of our life, every period of our life journey, as the domain of one's vocation.

The covenantal account of vocation is broader than one's profession, occupation, or special task. Hearing God's call and discovering one's primary profession does not exhaust the entirety of vocation. While a special vocation is concerned with the divine-human covenant, a general vocation also relates to human-human covenants. Covenant places "vocation" in a broad social-relational context. Again, as mentioned above, a general sense of vocation is also intimately associated with one's various social identities. A person develops and carries out several different identities in her life.

Christianity understands every significant social relationship as covenantal, and one's vocational responsibility is typically embedded in a particular, institutionalized covenantal relationship. It pertains to an intrinsic moral demand arising from the relationship. Responsibility arises as we respond to the sense of "call" intrinsic to the relationship. A teacher's vocation is embedded in a covenantal relationship with students, a

physician's with patients, a pastor's with congregants. Hence even after being called, there always is a task to discover a public meaning of the task and to equip oneself through ongoing study and conversation. To have a vocation is to find ourselves as God's stewards in every domain of our lives. William May writes:

> Taken seriously, the two sides to a covenant—gift and task—define the self as steward rather than owner. We operate daily in the contractual arena of owning, buying, and selling, but that arena does not itself exhibit as stewards, selves beholden in all we undertake. In the most intimate of areas, who can think of themselves as owners? Who can own his or her child or mate? In those relations, we are stewards at most and at our best—and stewards as well in our rising, studying, working, buying and selling, voting, and governing. "What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast, as if it were not a gift?" (1 Cor. 4:7).[17]

We need to be equipped to carry out our tasks competently and faithfully to God and to all the people involved in the relationship (colleagues, teachers, clients, interns, co-workers, etc.).

Christians inhabit multiple "covenants" and multiple social spheres; we are called to exercise multiple senses of vocation corresponding to those covenants. Max L. Stackhouse notes: "The life of faith is thus not only to be cultivated in the church but to be cultivated in and by the church for actualization in [other social] areas."[18] Each covenant relationship, such as friend-friend, wife-husband, parent-child, employer-employee, physician-patient, political leader-people, teacher-student, is the

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[17] William May, *Testing the National Covenant: Fears and Appetites in American Politics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 94.

[18] Stackhouse, *Covenant and Commitments*, 151.

realm of our vocation. Being a husband is just as much vocation as being a business manager. In short, the specific content of vocation is a covenant that is relationship-dependent. Each relationship is a concrete social outworking of God's demand for justice, righteousness, and peacemaking. Our vocational activities should cohere with a moral mandate from each relationship. Various rules, laws, and commandments articulate the content of what God calls Christians to be and to do in their social relationships.[19]

Our search for a deeper meaning of vocation does not easily settle in this era of globalization, high mobility, and change. As society and economy change, jobs also change (new jobs are added and old ones fade way). Even the same job may demand a radically different type of performance. Our sense of vocation can be precarious in this context. Despite the changes, we must hold onto the fundamentals of vocation—what the work is ultimately about, who our partners are, and how it serves the common good of humanity.

Our sense of vocation may sometimes be confused and conflicted as social relationships undergo changes; it can become fragmented under the pressure of demanding loyalties and attentions. Thus a concern of moral formation is to learn to discern and *negotiate* priority and vocational responsibilities when faced with competing commitments and a changing nature of relationships. It is the responsibility of the church to clarify and guide each sphere toward God-ordained mandate and responsibility through teaching, healing, and all ministries called by God.

Shalom

The ultimate *telos* (goal) of vocation is God's shalom. According to Cornelius Plantinga,

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[19] Schuurman, *Vocation*, 41.

> In the Bible, shalom means *universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight*—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights.[20]

While secular Millennials tend to interpret vocation only in personal terms, every vocation is tasked to strive toward common flourishing. Vocation is our exercise of covenantal obligation in various stations of our lives as we strive toward shalom—the common task of reconciling and repairing the world, to expand the reconciled community and its blissful fellowship to the rest of the creation.

What are the implications here? Let us use the example of a therapist's vocation. Although the immediate concern of a therapist is the health of a client, a collective vision of shalom cannot be disregarded in her exercise of vocation. That is, the responsibility of a therapist is not just to help a client to recover her sense of individual control and autonomy by resolving intra- or interpersonal conflicts or to enhance her adaptive capability in society, but it is also to help the client to see a respective moral demand of important relationships involving her and to empower her to achieve a just peacemaking (reconciliation) with others in a way consistent with God's will for the relationships.

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[20] Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 10 (emphasis original). I have a minor qualification on Plantinga's definition of shalom in the quote. Although in the Bible shalom is sometimes used, with a broader implication, to describe comic wholeness, it sometimes simply refers to the absence of war. My use of shalom in this chapter is the former. I appreciate my colleague John Goldingay for his helpful comment on this matter.

Conclusion

       This chapter discussed how the secularization of vocation has lost an essential moral dimension, leaving it with only a personal existential dimension, and how this shift to an immanent frame is limited in its ability to build moral formation, public virtues and professionalism appropriate to a particular occupation.

       The biblical understanding of vocation has something to offer to secular culture. Covenant helps to clarify the nature of vocation and offers a structure and process through which our sense of vocation is understood, shaped, nurtured, and performed. A covenantal idea of vocation is personal as well as missional in nature; it reconciles personal particularity and public responsibility in our vocational life. This covenantal understanding of vocation embraces a secular idea of vocation as self-fulfillment, but it also reminds one of a moral public dimension. To be covenanted is to live out one's vocation faithfully in every domain of life by discerning the mandates of each relationship. In this sense, covenant offers a guiding light for emerging young adults who want to find a sense of purpose and meaning larger than themselves when society itself has lost a moral frame of reference, and cannot provide any incentive to do it. They will find in the Christian idea of vocation the frame of reference that is truly fulfilling and meaningful—thus claiming their entire lives for service.

Formation Towards a Community of Credibility

Reflections from the Korean Protestant Church

Sebastian Kim

One of the important qualities of those who are called by God is credibility, or trustworthiness, in the eyes of God, the Christian community and the wider society. Disciples are primarily witnesses (Acts 1:8) and it is by our lives more than our words that Christ is made known (John 13:35). Jesus repeated the eighth commandment when he condemned false witness (Matt 15:19; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20). Christian formation must address this aspect of character seriously. Yet it seems that theological education in Korea has failed in this regard. "Credibility surveys" of Korean Christianity have repeatedly shown that the public perception of Protestants, especially the leadership, is very low.

By discussing the findings of the "credibility surveys" and brief examinations of two recent cases of Korean Protestant megachurches whose actions have cost them credibility, I will highlight the credibility gap or untrustworthiness of the Christian community and emphasize the need for formation in theological education, at least in the case of Korea, to stress credibility or trustworthiness as a Christian virtue. I will then employ Martin Marty's conception of the "public church" to suggest an agenda for Christian formation in Korean theological education to deal with the shortfall of credibility of the Protestant churches in Korea. While this chapter discusses specifically the Korean Protestant Churches, the lessons we will learn about formation toward a community of credibility apply to Protestant theological education in general, especially in the West.

The Credibility Gap of the Protestant Churches in South Korea

The release on November 20, 2008 of the findings of a survey conducted on the credibility of the Protestant churches in Korea created much controversy and raised critical voices among theologians and church leaders.[1] The findings of the credibility survey can be divided into three categories: first, the credibility of the Protestant churches themselves. To the question of "how much do you trust the Protestant churches?" 18.4% people said they trusted them ("trust" and "strongly trust") but 48.3% of people said they did not trust Protestant Christians ("distrust" and "strongly distrust"). Furthermore, the response from non-Protestants to the same question was even more marked at 7.45% and 57.24% respectively. The second category of the questionnaire was a comparative survey of credibility among selected groups. For the question regarding the credibility among the three major religious groups, the overall ranking of trust was: Catholics (35.2%), Buddhists (31.1%), and Protestants (18.0%). The statistics from non-religious people are more critical: Catholics 37.9%, Buddhists 29.0%, and Protestants a mere 7.6%. The third category asked questions about what the main problems of the Protestant churches are and what needs to be done in order to improve their credibility. The main problems appear to be discontinuity between words and deeds among Protestant Christians (50.8%), between the sermons and lifestyles of ministers (43.3%), and between the message and operations of the churches (34.3%). On the question of what needs to be changed in order to improve

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[1] Christian Ethics Movement in Korea (CEMK), "Results of an Opinion Poll on the Credibility of Korean Churches in 2008" (in Korean), (November 26, 2008): https://trusti.tistory.com/362 (accessed 10/12/19). The survey was conducted by the Christian Ethics Movement of Korea along with the Christian Broadcasting Company (CBS), *Kookmin-Ilbo*, and *Mokhoe-wa-Shinhack* and supported by Korean Christian Ministers Association. The survey was conducted among over 1,000 adults in South Korea between 23 and 27 October 2008.

credibility, top of the list is church leaders (25.5%) followed by the operation of the churches (24.4%), church members (17.2%), evangelism (16.2%), and social activities (15.4%). The answers to the question of what the church should do in order to improve trust were: consistency of words and deeds (42%), tolerance towards other religions (25.8%), improved social services (11.9%) and financial transparency (11.5%).

Responding to the survey of 2008, a number of scholars saw that the lack of "social capital" of the Protestant churches was obvious in the eyes of the public and suggested that the key problems for the Protestant churches are, first, the ethics of church members and leaders, and their exclusivist attitude toward other religious. Second, although early Protestant Christians made significant contributions to the life of the Korean people, they had gradually lost inner maturity and rather concentrated on outer growth, buildings, personal success and achievement. The third problem was the quality of the ministers. What was needed was a restored theological perspective that mature faith has to do with relations with God and neighbor, an authentic life of faith, and the realization of Christian civil membership as citizens of this world.[2]

Similar surveys were conducted in 2009, 2010, 2013 and 2017 and the results were not much different. In the 2017 survey, the key areas of improvement needed from the perspective of general public were financial transparency (26.1%); attitude towards other religions (21.9%), and the life of church leaders (17.2%). When it comes to church leaders, by far the most important area identified for improvement was in the ethical and moral conduct of Church leaders (49.4%).[3] Based on the findings

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[2] CEMK, *Seminar on the 2008 Credibility Survey of Korean Churches* (in Korean; Seoul: CEMK, 2008), 40–48.

[3] CEMK, "Results of the 2017 Korean Church's Credibility Survey" (in Korean), (March 3, 2017): https://cemk.org/resource /2699/ (accessed 11/5/19).

of these five surveys, it was pointed out that the credibility of the Korean Protestant is in a serious situation and that the trends seem to have worsened. There is a noticeable gap between the answers between Christians and non-Christians. Despite significant contributions in the past, the involvement of Protestants in social welfare is decreasing whereas the political involvement of fundamentalist Christian leaders is increasing.[4]

Of course, statistics demonstrate only part of the whole picture and the results depend on the questions asked and the options provided for the answers. However, it is clear that, from the perspectives of non-religious people, the credibility of Protestant churches is significantly lower than that of other major religious groups, and this view is even more pronounced when it comes to the views of Catholics and Buddhists. In other words, contemporary Protestant churches face their own "credit crunch" both from religious and non-religious people.[5]

This "credit crunch" was again brought to the attention of the public when, during Fall, 2019, there were two significant decisions relating to Protestant Churches which made headline news in the South Korean media. The first was the decision of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) regarding the transition of the position of the senior minister of Myungsung Church on September 26, and the other was the decision of the Supreme Court on the construction of the new church building of SaRang Church on October 17. The two churches drew much attention not only among Christians but also from the general public due to their influence and the nature of these long-drawn legal disputes.

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[4] CEMK, *Seminar on the 2017 Credibility Survey of Korean Churches* (in Korean; Seoul: CEMK, 2017), 52–95.

[5] CEMK, "Credibility of Korean Churches in 2008."

The Dispute over the Succession of the Senior Minister of Myungsung Church

The first case is of Myungsung Church, which started in 1980 with about twenty members in what was then the outskirts south-east of Seoul. The church grew rapidly, partly due to the development of high-rise apartments and also due to the popularity of the senior pastor, Kim Sam-hwan, who was known for his preaching and for special early morning prayer meetings. They built their first church in 1983 but then they demolished it and built a new church with 4,000 seats in 1989. Then in 2011, they built a new and larger building right next to the previous one with 7,200 seats. Myungsung church, with around 100,000 members, has been supporting mission, education, social welfare and other services in Korea and overseas. In many ways, Pastor Kim was a prototype of a "successful" minister. He came from very humble background and became the senior pastor of the largest Presbyterian church in the world. He was highly admired by both Christians and non-Christians for his humble attitude, simple and approachable preaching, charismatic leadership, and the contribution of the church's social and economic services to the wider society.

Although the church had faced criticism for its excessive accumulation of wealth and the lack of transparency in its expenditure, it was the recent dispute about the successor of the senior minister that made it so controversial. There had been a growing concern among Protestant churches of the tendency of the founding pastor of megachurches to pass the senior ministerial role to their sons or sons-in-law.[6] To respond to this

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[6] For the details of the history of *saeseup*, see Bae Dawk-mahn, "A Historical Study on the Hereditary Succession of Senior Pastorship in Korea," (in Korean) *Theology and Mission* 43 (2013): 70–102. According to Bae, 124 churches transferred their senior pastorship through *saeseup* between 1973 and 2015 (directly or indirectly). Out of these, half were large churches of over 1,000 members; cf. 71–78.

problem, the Korean Methodist Church (KMC) and the two main Presbyterian denominations passed constitutional changes to enable an "anti-*saeseup*" or anti-nepotism law between 2012 and 2013. There had been strong speculation that Pastor Kim's son, Kim Hana would succeed his father, but he became the senior minister of a new branch church, New Song Myungsung Church, and senior pastor Kim retired from the church on December 2015. However, in March 2017, the congregation made the decision to invite Pastor Kim Hana as the senior pastor and also to merge the two churches, which triggered the controversy.

The Seoul South-East Synod, the governing body of the church, accepted the decision of the church and Pastor Kim became an official senior pastor of Myungsung Church on November 2017. But the case was brought to the general assembly's judiciary as against the constitution. As the decisions of the judiciary became entangled with internal politics, and in the midst of severe criticisms both within and outside Christian circles, the general assembly eventually accepted a proposal for a compromise by majority vote on September 26, 2019. The agreement stated that Kim Hana could become the senior pastor from January 1, 2021, if the church still decided to appoint him then but this still generated further criticism from various sections of church and society.

The arguments brought out by the those who support the church's position were that the decision was made properly within the constitution; that Kim Hana was the overwhelming choice of the congregation therefore it was inappropriate for others to interfere in the affairs of the local church, that the decision was for the stability and sustainability of the church since there have been many cases of church division due to tensions between retired and new senior pastors; in some has been a strong resentment from the church of jealousy from other church

leaders.[7]

There has been strong opposition to *saeseup* among Christian organizations and individuals.[8] Those who are against *saeseup* argue that its sociological root causes are the Korean cultural tendency of family-oriented capitalism together with authoritarian leadership, obsession with church growth, individualism, and the lack of mature theology.[9] The main theological arguments against it are: that it challenges Christ's role as the head of the church and tends to replace it with senior pastor;[10] it denies the publicness of the individual Christian church as a part of the wider Christian community, which should follow Christian values and ethical high standards; and it hinders Christian mission by exhibiting the nepotism and corruption within the church. More pragmatically, it prevents opportunity for a fair and healthy competition for the transition of leadership, and it is against the secular law, which prevents the transfer of position and role in the public institutions.[11] Seol Hoon, in his substantial research on the topic sees the close similarity of church *saeseup* and the *jaebul*, or Korean family-run conglomerates. The problem of *saeseup* has deep roots not only in fundamentalism and individualism in the church but also in familyism. He insists that

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[7] Yong-pil Lee, "Statement of the Elders' Meeting of Myungsung Church," *newsnjoy.or.kr* (November 25, 2017): http://www. Newsnjoy .or.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=214539 (accessed 10/4/19).

[8] See Bae Duck-man, *Let Us Not Engage in Church Saeseup* (in Korean; Seoul: CEMK, 2016), 58–88.

[9] Bae Dawk-mahn, "Korean Church *Saeseup*: Its Distorted History," (in Korean) *Theology and Mission* 43 (2013): 17–27.

[10] Im Hwe-sook, "The Problem of *Saeseup* in Korean Churches: Perspectives from the Feminist Theology," (in Korean) *Journal of Korean Feminist Theology* 43 (2000): 93–107.

[11] Kim Dong-chun, "What is the Problem of Church *Saeseup*?" (in Korean) *Kookjae Shinhak* 18 (2016), 116–118; Kang Young-an, "*Saeseup*, What is the Problem?" *Philosophy and Reality* 12 (2000): 91–98; and Hong Keun-soo, "*Saeseup*, Is it Christian?" (in Korean) *Journal of Korean Feminist Theology* 43 (2000): 57–73.

the problem of *saeseup* in the Korean church is a distortion of the biblical understanding of spiritual leadership and condemns theological corruption by which the spirit of the church is dependent on the senior pastor and his succession, as if that is identical with the maintenance of the identity of God's church.[12]

Myungsung Church may have followed the proper procedure for appointing the new senior pastor, and the exact wording of the PCK Constitution is rather ambiguous as is demonstrated by the different verdicts in the judiciary committee, nevertheless the church leaders failed to read the "signs of the times." A deep concern about the credibility and integrity of church leaders was raised by the wider Christian community and the general public.

The Dispute with the City Authorities over the Construction of SaRang Church

The second case study is SaRang Church (formally Gangnam Eunpyeung Church), which was started by Ock Han-hum (John H. Oak) in Gangnam, South of the Han River in Seoul in 1978. Pastor Ock became well known for the discipleship program at his church and his book, Called to *Awaken the Laity: Principle and Practice of Discipleship Training* (1984),[13] which is one of the most widely read books by Korean Christians. With his single vision of discipleship and his simple life style, Ock became one of the most respected church leaders in Korea.

The main chapel of SaRang Church was built in 1985, and after the retirement of Pastor Ock in 2003, Oh Jung-hyun became his successor. The church continued to grow and decided to build

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[12] Seol Hoon, "Critical Review of Religious Authority and Church *Saeseuop*" (in Korean; Ph.D. dissertation, SungKongHoe University, 2017), 216–37.

[13] John H. Oak, *Called to Awaken the Laity: Principle and Practice of Discipleship Training* (in Korean; Seoul: Disciple Making Ministries International, 1984).

a new church building. The church bought land nearby in 2009 and started to make a master design including an underground main chapel. They initially hoped to build a 6,000-seat chapel but it was estimated that only 4,500 seats could be included within the land area. So the church approached the Seocho-gu [provincial] office and persuaded them to allow the congregation to use an underground section of a public road. This was unprecedented since, under the law, no private permanent buildings and constructions are allowed to use public road. The building work started in June, 2010 and a group of citizens in the area brought this case to Seoul City Hall in 2011. Meanwhile the church completed and started to worship in the new chapel in 2013 with its 6,500 seats. The new building has fourteen and eight-floor twin buildings and many smaller chapels and offices above ground and a seven-floor underground, including the main chapel and parking. The total cost of the project was estimated to be $255 million and the main chapel was recorded in the Guinness Book as the "largest underground church" in the world. The church is connected right through to the subway station at the heart of Gangnam, the most affluent area of Seoul, and right next to the Supreme Court. After a long legal procedure over 9 years, the final decision of Supreme Court delivered on October 17, 2019 was that the church should stop occupying the public road and restore it as before. For this order to be carried out, the church has to restore a part of the main sanctuary including, the pulpit and the choir, if not, the regional office can charge a large fine.[14]

When the church decided to negotiate for the site and faced a strong opposition from the Provincial Office and also local residents, concerns were raised within the church as well. The response of Pastor Oh during his sermon on August 2012 was that "above any social law, there is moral law; above any moral law

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[14] The church has already spent $1.7 million for the use of the road and $2.5 million for court cases for the last 10 years.

there is spiritual worship law." He argued a few hundred people are against this while the church has 20,000 or more congregation living in the province. He also insisted that the church is "spiritual public area" where people can use the space the church has provided. However, although the church has opened various venues within the building to the general public and donated a children's nursing home to the provincial office, the verdict of the courts has made it clear that the church building is not a public space for all to access, especially not for those who hold other religious faiths.[15] The new building was officially dedicated on June 1, 2019, about five years after the initial completion of the chapel, attended by the Mayor of Seoul and the Head of Seocho-gu office along with many church leaders and VIPs. During the ceremony, Kim Jang-hwan, former president of the Far East Broadcasting Company and president of the Baptist World Alliance (2000–2005), praised the congregation of SaRang Church, saying that if there is Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, Westminster Cathedral in London, and a National Cathedral in Washington, and then there is SaRang Church in Seoul and that the city is being blessed because of it. Cho Eun-hee, the Head of Seocho-gu Office said it was a real blessing to have such church facilities for the province and that she has committed to continue to provide the permission to use the occupied space. This comment was enthusiastically welcomed by the congregation but caused controversy and later she had to apologize for overstepping her position.[16]

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[15] See Jung-Hyun Oh, "Let Us Keep the Spiritual Public Good, by Holding Fast Spiritually, Even Though It Goes Against the Law," (in Korean) PrayforSarang, August 2012, YouTube video, 2:40, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UuCSqSNin8Y(accessed 11/9/19).

[16] Choi Seung-hyun, "Splendid Dedication Ceremony of SaRang Church," (in Korean) *newsnjoy.or.kr* (June 1, 2016): http://www.newsnjoy.or.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=223782(accessed 11/9/19).

The decision of the Supreme Court has put the church in a critical situation. The official position of the church as stated on its website, is that they received the permission from the provincial office, which is the official body; that the use of underground space was not the original plan, but that it became necessary as they negotiated the design of the parking space for elderly and disabled people; that the church pays $346,000 annually to the office for the use of the land and facilities; that rather than preferential treatment, the church has made a great contributions to the local society which are a good model for a common cause; and that the church is a public building which is open to everybody, even more than public offices and facilities. The church also mentions the group behind the legal dispute as an anti-Christian group and accuses them of having an ulterior agenda.[17]

However, the public opinion of SaRang Church both within and outside Christian circles is overwhelmingly negative. According to the decision of the Supreme Court, the legal status of any public space, including underground, is strictly preserved by the law of the land and no permanent structure should be built there. When it comes to any aspects of common life in society, churches should abide by the rule of the secular law. This case is seen as an example of the misuse of large church's influence on political authority to achieve their purpose when the legal guidelines were clear and the present situation is against the public good, against the principle of the separation of state-religion, and against equal treatment.[18] Though SaRang Church could argue that they had received the necessary permissions

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[17] Sarang Church, "Q&A Regarding Chamnari Road Verdict," (in Korean) *sarang,org* (October 20, 2019): https://www.sarang.org/info/qna.asp (accessed 11/5/19).

[18] Song Ki-chun, "Is SaRang Church Only a Public Good?," (in Korean) *newsnjoy.or.kr* (November 28, 2019): http://www.newsnjoy.or.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=225632 (accessed 10/20/19).

from the legitimate authority, insisting on the necessity of building a larger chapel for the public good failed to convince others and demonstrated a lack of credibility in the eyes of the general public.

Credibility as a Necessary Hallmark of Christian Formation
A Three-Part Program

Although we could say that these two cases are isolated ones and that there are many large and small churches which are faithfully working with both their congregations and the wider society, these two cases demonstrate a serious problem of the Korean Protestant churches in their public relations with the contemporary wider community. It seems that, in the midst of their rapid growth, Protestant churches have generated a serious problem by their social and communal conduct in relation to public life and this credibility failure of the Protestant church is shown by the recent surveys. Reflecting on this situation, I would like to suggest that the key problem of the Protestant church is its distorted view of the church in its relation to the wider society. This is an ecclesiological problem but it also shows a lack of formation of church leaders. The credibility crisis reflects a failure of Christian education to form future Christian leaders in trustworthiness, integrity, and accountability.

In order to address this character weakness, I would like to suggest a three-part agenda for formation in theological education. These three parts are based on the work of Martin Marty on the "public church." Marty expressed about three concerns about churches in public life: the church's tendency to a theocratic approach (*totalist*), exclusive and self-interested approach (*tribalist*), or individualistic approach (*privatist*).[19] Marty's three problems, although expressed in a US context, are

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[19] Martin Marty, *Public Church: Mainline-Evangelical-Catholic* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 6–8.

also raised by the surveys and cases considered above. I will take them, in a different order, to suggest a formation agenda for the Korean churches.

The privatist or individualistic problem

The Korean Protestant churches tend to hold a local-church-centered theology. The zeal and enthusiasm of evangelists has been credited for the growth of the Korean churches, but the adoption in 1891 of the "Nevius method" was instrumental for church's self-esteem. By the Three-Self method of church planting (self-propagation, self-governing and self-supporting),[20] it aimed to establish a strong, independent native church which was missionary in its own right and not dependent on the foreign mission. One of the legacies of this method is church communitarianism, which is especially conducive to local growth.[21] Korean Protestant churches have been earnestly self-governing and self-supporting to the extent that this method causes an obsession with their own local churches and they are even prepared to encourage members of other churches to join their own churches. This has caused competition between churches within an area and the loss of a sense of the Christian community as the wider body of Christ and the household of God. Instead there is a serious misunderstanding that the body of Christ is limited to a local congregation only. The surveys suggest that excessive interest in the growth of their own congregation is a problem for both the church members and those who outside the church, who are the targets of aggressive evangelism. This attitude prohibits ecumenical work among the churches in the

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[20] See Sebastian Kim, "Mega Churches in South Korea: Their Impact and Prospect in the Public Sphere," *A Moving Faith: Mega Churches Go South* (ed., Jonathan D. James; Los Angeles: Sage, 2015), 85–105.

[21] Lee Won-gue, *What is it all about the Korean Church?* (in Korean; Seoul: Methodist Theological Seminary Publishing, 1998).

same area, between different denominations, and even between churches within the same denomination. Churches have been operating on the principles of the capitalist market economy and political closeness to the democratic and capitalist system has been fully exploited as the churches seek for numerical growth.

James Dunn writes that it is fundamental to Paul's theology that the body of Christ has a "corporate identity", and that "as it is human embodiment which makes society possible, so the church is the means by which Christ makes actual tangible encounter with wider society."[22] He further sees that the body of Christ should be the model for the wider society, a "model of integration and mutual interdependence, or caring and sharing of respect and responsibility."[23] Similarly, N.T. Wright suggests that the church is a new community "cutting across normal boundaries and barriers" and as a "*microcosmos*," like a beacon, a "prototype of what was to come" and "a place of reconciliation between God and the world" where humans might be reconciled to each other.[24] Here we see a clear message that the body of Christ is not confined to a local church but it is constantly connected and related to other churches, to broader Christian communities, and to wider society.

By emphasizing the importance of the local church as *the* body of Christ, Korean Protestant Christians are neglecting its place in the wider ecumenical body of Christ with neighboring churches and beyond. The underlying arguments of both Myungsung and SaRang were based on *their* own decision and the concerns and opinions of *other* churches and the wider society mattered little or none. Formation in theological education should correct such privatist thinking and, through liturgy and practices,

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[22] James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 534–36, 563–64.
[23] Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 735–36.
[24] N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 1491–93.

convey a sense of belonging to a world church and of the interdependency of the body of Christ as David Bosch insists that "we need new relationships, mutual responsibility, accountability, and interdependence (not independence!)."[25]

The tribalist or exclusivist problem

The majority of Protestants hold an exclusive theology toward people of other faiths and of no faith. This exclusive theology tends to lead to a rejection of others and an unwillingness to enter into dialogue. This becomes particularly problematic when the church is closely associated with political power and enjoys economic strength. The Protestant churches have become so confident that they are arrogant toward people of other faiths and none. In the surveys, people of other faiths responded to this aspect of Protestantism in a very negative way. This exclusivism combines with Korean socio-cultural tendencies of familyism and sectarianism, and with the preference for spiritual and hierarchical leadership, to create a powerful energy for togetherness and shared identity. While this may be a key resource to build up a congregation, it also feeds tribalist views.

In recent years, significant voices have been raised for promoting the common good in Christian theology and practice. The theology of the common good was initially articulated in Catholic Social Teaching.[26] Although there are various interpretations of the meaning of the common good, Catholic Social Teaching highlights rejection the extremes of individualism

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[25] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 466.

[26] See Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching, 1891-Present: A Historical, Theological and Ethical Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002) and Martin Rhonheimer, *The Common Good of Constitutional Democracy: Essays on Political Philosophy and on Catholic Social Teaching* (Washington. D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2013).

and collectivism (or liberal democracy and social democracy); an emphasis on freedom, equality and the participation of persons as well as incorporating human rights; a challenge to the utilitarian approach of a majoritarian view; a vision for a politics of consensus to reach a maximum agreement toward the advantage of all such, as in the case of the rule of law; and a requirement that the parties pursue commonality and relationship.[27] In his discussion on Christianity and democracy, John de Gruchy sees the common good as binding its members together in mutual accountability,[28] whereas Jim Wallis insists that the common good is a "new ethic of civility" and a vision that "allows us to make our faith public but not narrowly partisan." For Christians, he argues, the idea of the common good derives from Jesus' commandment to love our neighbors, which he regards as "the most transformational social ethic" and that our treatment towards the most vulnerable is the "moral test" of any society's integrity.[29]

Traditionally Koreans hold a philosophy of *yin-yang*, which has the complex meaning of harmony through careful balance of duality in daily life, but tend to emphasize the latter dimension of duality and the often-opposing spheres of life: such as, darkness and light, negative and positive, summer and winter, or male and female. Religiously, this implies a rigid separation of good and evil, right and wrong, or sacred and secular, and this dichotomic approach takes any form of accommodation as a compromise to be rejected. This tendency could be identified and

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[27] Nicholas Sagovsky and Peter McGrail, "Introduction," *Together for the Common Good: Towards a National Conversation* (eds. Nicholas Sagovsky and Peter McGrail; London: SCM, 2015), xxvi–xxviii.

[28] John de Gruchy, *Christianity and Democracy: A Theology for a Just World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 264–67.

[29] Jim Wallis, *The (Un)Common Good: How the Gospel Brings Hope to A World Divided* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2013), xi–xiii.

challenged during formation by immersion in the biblical wisdom tradition. According to Gerhard von Rad, Israel's wisdom tradition created an "intellectual sphere in which it was possible to discuss both the multiplicity of trivial, daily occurrences as well as basic theological principles".[30] The wisdom tradition is embedded in the sacred text of the Hebrew Bible, and yet its perspective and scope are not limited to the people of Israel nor to faith matters—it is a guidance for the ethical, moral and social life of individual and community and for living together with others in Israel and beyond. In this regards, David Ford calls for both secular and religious communities to engage in "mutually critical engagement,"[31] especially for "the priority of the common good".[32] Drawing on the wisdom tradition, students can begin to appreciate what they have in common with others and see the attraction of working together toward common goals.

The totalist or theocratic approach

As revealed in the surveys and also in the two cases, there has been consistent criticism of Korean churches as authoritarian, theocratic, and in need of being shaped as self-reflective and self-critical communities. This can be viewed as church not engaging in critical assessment of any aspects of Christian life. Unchecked this will eventually lead to corruption and misuse of power in the church, and also to the gap between words and deeds which has been a prime criticism of Christian leaders in Korea. Lee Won-kyu, a sociologist and an ardent critique of Korean Protestant churches, points out that, in spite of their very high proportion of social and material contributions to society and also their low rate

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[30] Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (tr. James D. Martin; London: SCM, 2012), 81, 289, 307.

[31] David Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 301.

[32] David Ford, "God and Our Public Life," *International Journal of Public Theology* 1.1 (2007): 63–81.

of individual criminal offenses compared to the general public, the religiosity of Protestant Christians is deepening while their social credibility is low and worsening. He blames this on a lack of spirituality, morality, and communal identity among the Protestant Christians that is especially to do with the quality of church leadership.[33]

Edward Schillebeeckx, a public theologian influenced by the critical theory, emphasized that theory and action should come together to enhance the transformation of society and that the two should mutually inform each other.[34] For him, hermeneutics must have an emancipative, practical and critical interest that fosters human freedom and understanding,[35] because he understood theology as "self-consciousness of a critical praxis" in the living community of believers.[36] The significance of his approach to our discussion is that religious life should be self-critical and should be self-reforming. The critical issue facing Protestant churches is not its lack of the identification of problems but the lack of concrete action to make changes within. Korean churches often talk about raising prophetic voice in society for justice and peace, but do little to act prophetically inside.[37] This lack of criticality is major hindrance to church reform in Korea.

To address this problem, Christian formation should

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[33] Lee Won-kyu, *The Crisis and Hope of Korean Church from the Socio-Religious Perspectives* (in Korean; Seoul: KMC, 2010), 7, 216–26.

[34] Robert J. Schreiter, "Edward Schillebeeckx: An Orientation to His Thought," *The Schillebeeckx Reader* (ed. Robert J. Schreiter; London: Crossroad, 1987), 18–19.

[35] Philip Kennedy, *Schillebeeckx* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 50–52.

[36] Schreiter, *Schillebeeckx Reader*, 118–19.

[37] See Lee Won-gue, *Where is the Korean Church Going?* (in Korean; Seoul: CLC, 2000), 276–99; Chung Jae-young, *Understanding Korean Churches from Socio-religious Perspectives* (in Korean; Seoul: Open Publications, 2012), 318–38; and Han Wan-sang, *What's the Problem with the Korean Church?* (in Korean; Seoul: Korean Christian Press, 1981), 7–12.

incorporate healthy critical reflection and self-development as well as community development. In a recent attempt to seek what Marty calls "public church", the Institute of the Public Theology and Church (IPTC) at the Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary in Seoul tried to address the problem of the lack of criticality in the Korean church by issuing publications and statements. The IPTC's "milestone" statement states that its aim is to help the Korean church to take up its public responsibility in the contexts of the kingdom of God and God's mission (*mission trinitatis*) in history. While acknowledging the public contributions of Protestant Christianity, such as the social up-lifting of the people, the March 1 independence movement, the democratization movement, and the peaceful unification movements, it also points out that that there are various factors preventing Korean churches from carrying out their public responsibilities. These include: the theological separation between church and the world; prioritizing soul over body; materialistic focus on church growth; supporting those who are in power and authority; and ghettoization of the church community according to ideological stance.[38] There are a number of critical voices within and outside the church,[39] but these voices need to be translated into the "self-consciousness of a critical praxis" in the midst of Korean churches. Christian formation must involve the critical theory (in a specifically theological manner) of the praxis of faith and the relationship with praxis forms an inseparable part of doing theology.

Conclusion

There are ample examples of the contributions of

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[38] IPTC, *Public Theology and Public Church* (in Korean; Seoul: Kingdom Books, 2010), 14–24.

[39] In particular, see the Christian Ethics Movement in Korea at https://cemk.org/ (accessed 10/4/19).

Protestant Christians in the history of Korea, but the contemporary Protestant church is in crisis, facing a great shortfall of credibility in their presence in the public sphere. In this regard, another way to examine the situation is to look into some of historical events initiated by Christians, who were inspired by biblical wisdom and insights and had the courage to put these into practice. Examining the motivations and resources that undergirded these historical examples of praxis will help to answer the question of how Korean churches can escape the confines of the three problems Marty has helped us identify how the church can resist privatism, tribalism and totalism, and can be a catalyst for the wider movement for the common good of the wider society. There needs to be a collective effort to respond to this challenge, as stated in the Christian Ethics Movement of Korea, which encourages Christians to move towards the public sphere with honest (integrity) and accountability (responsibility) and justice (equality). They may need to take up the challenge brought by the prophet Micah (6:8) to "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly" with God *and with their neighbors*.

Vocation and Formation for the Religiously Pluralistic World

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen

The world in which theological education and ministerial training finds itself in the beginning of the third millennium is vastly and radically different from what it was throughout centuries in the Western world when it was assumed that the prospective ministers only need to know about Christian tradition in order to prepare for the work in the church.[1] An ecumenical document states:

> Today Christians in almost all parts of the world live in religiously plural societies. Persistent plurality and its impact on their daily lives are forcing them to seek new and adequate ways of understanding and relating to peoples of other religious traditions. . . . All religious communities are being reshaped by new encounters and relationships. . . . There is greater awareness of the interdependence of human life, and of the need to collaborate across religious barriers in dealing with the pressing problems of the world. All religious traditions, therefore, are challenged to contribute to the emergence

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[1] In this essay, I glean from my "Teaching Global Theology in a Comparative Mode," *Teaching Global Theologies: Power and Praxis* (eds. Kwok Pui-lan, Cecilia González-Andrieu and Dwight N. Hopkins; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 45–53 and "Dialogue, Witness, and Tolerance: The Many Faces of Interfaith Encounters," *Theology, News & Notes* 57.2 (Fall 2010): 29–33. The latter article is also available at https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/dialogue-witness-tolerance-many-dimensions-interfaith-encounters/(accessed3/8/2019).Hence, references in the current essay have been kept to minimum.

of a global community that would live in mutual respect and peace.[2]

Just think of the statistics: at the time of this writing, about a third of the world's population belongs to the Christian church (2.4 billion) and about a quarter is comprised of Muslims (1.6 billion). The 1 billion Hindus make up about 15 percent, followed by Buddhists at half that number. Jews number fewer than 15 million, and among the remainder, over 400 million belong to various kinds of "folk religions." Only about 15 percent (1 billion) label themselves religiously unaffiliated (even though the majority of them entertain some kind of religious-type beliefs and practices). This means that our world is currently more religious than ever—even if forms of secularism are also flourishing, though number-wise in a much more modest manner.

What should we think of this diversity? In the fifth chapter of the book of Joshua, there is a brief narrative easily overlooked by the readers. Joshua himself was confronted by a man with a drawn sword in his hand. In response to his question "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" the Israelite leader received a counterintuitive and surprising response from the messenger of the Lord: "No; but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come" (5:13, 14 RSV). Thereafter, Joshua was urged to take off his shoes in preparation for the experience of the holiness of God in the midst of a desert. The lesson to our divided, conflicted world is simple and profound: faith in God is not about out setting people(s) of different persuasions against each other. The God of the Bible is not fighting on one side against the other side—although, as often as it has happened through centuries, the armies on both sides of the war zone believe that they have been

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[2] World Council of Churches, "Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding," *oikoumene.org* (February 14, 2006), §§2–3: https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/20 06-porto-alegre/3-preparatory-and-background-documents/religious-plurality-and-christian-self-understanding (accessed 3/7/2019).

blessed in the name of their God to fight the enemy on the other side. Often the enemy has represented another religion. The Joshua narrative reminds us that whatever else religion might mean, it is about God's holiness, love, and care for all. Dividing walls are being eradicated and bridges built.

I believe theological education and ministerial formation has much to do with preparing men and women to work and live in the world in which not only ethnic, national, political, and economic differences divide and cause conflict but also religious diversity is a potential source of conflicts and wars. And even more: apart from alleviating the danger of battles and fights, astute theological training could also play a profound role in shaping the vocation and identity of Christian leaders preparing to minister in a religiously pluralistic world.

This need for cultivating vocation and designing formation for the sake of the pluralistic world, however, has not been in the forefront of theological training. On the contrary, to be honest, by and large it has been ignored altogether. Even during times in the history of the church of heightened tensions with the religious other, such as those in North Africa with Islam in the seventh century or when new opportunities were looming large as with the neo-Hindu Reform's interest in Christ in nineteenth-century India, the opportunity was missed. And yet, making religious diversity an asset rather than an obstacle in the formation of men and women is a deeply *theological* mandate—as much as it is also practical and virtuous in itself. The reason it is a theological issue is simply this: "Our theological understanding of religious plurality begins with our faith in the one God who created all things, the living God present and active in all creation from the beginning. The Bible testifies to God as God of all nations and peoples, whose love and compassion includes all humankind."[3] How could we ever fail to notice this as theological

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[3] World Council of Churches, "Religious Plurality," §27.

educators?

An Autobiographical Note: How I Was Awakened from my Slumber

The need for a theological formation and vocation fit for the pluralistic world of ours was brought home to me decades ago when I first lived with my family and ministered in the religiously diverse context of Thailand. Teaching theology and doing church ministry in the "home" of Theravada (the original from of) Buddhism, with a significant minority of Muslims, Hindus, and a mix of folk religions, awakened me from the slumber of falsely assuming that we only deal with all-things-Christian but do not have to be concerned about other faith traditions. Indeed, this awakening did not come first from books or even my primary work of training Thai ministers in a Christian college. It rather came to me through ordinary experiences living as a young family in a large town house in Bangkok amidst Thai families. (Against the assumption and expectation set up by the established missionary community, as newcomers to a strange country eagerly learning the new language, we refused to live in the college compound alongside other foreigners. Instead we always rented an apartment in the city itself among ordinary Thai families.)

Coming home from the college for dinner, I recall having seen my then young daughters happily playing on the streets with Thai kids. True, the two blond long-haired fair-skinned girls stood out in the midst of a group of children. But they also fit in, not only because of having gained fluency in the language but also because they themselves felt like they *fit in*! Christian and Buddhist kids bonding together.

Sharing a bowl of rice with moms and dads of the playing kids in the neighborhood—the most intimate mode of fellowship in that culture—made us feel like we are welcomed. Sure, the neighbors knew we were Christians and they were Buddhists. But

the difference of religion never came up in the conversations about children's' school work, an upcoming flood, constant traffic jams, and similar everyday topics. Or to be more precise: religion itself could be, and often was, a natural part of everyday conversations. The conversations, however, were not conflicted.

Having been invited for the first time to a dedication of the neighbor's home on the other end of our town house—an hours-long elaborate religious ritual with a number of monks, led by a chief monk of the neighboring Thai monastery—I first hesitated. I wasn't sure if it was appropriate for a Christian minister to attend. For sure it is, the family conference decided. And I am happy we decided to go! After a most gracious welcome and introduction of this foreign family to the extended family and the religious, I was offered a plate full of incense and fruit and then invited to say a blessing upon the household. I said the prayer respectfully and boldly in the Christian mood. A number of people came to thank me for this hospitable gesture. Several of them mentioned to me later that the importance of having a *Christian* minister's presence in the feast was very meaningful for them.

With the advancement in Thai language, culture, and religious knowledge, debates and discussions with Thai experts further gave me opportunities to not only learn of this great religion but also of my own. Yes, we debated, but we did it in a civil, hospitable matter. No wonder my classroom experience in the college began to shift in focus: the little knowledge and experience I had gained about this host culture and religion began to "talk back" to me and at the same time to inspire and invigorate the teaching of basics of Christian doctrine.

In this process, my own vocation and calling as a Christian minister and theological educator began to be re-shaped. Integrating the challenge and asset of religious diversity as part of my own vocation not only immensely enriched my own scholarly and pedagogical work but also inspired and challenged my own

Christian faith. Indeed, it did not make me abandon my deepest convictions but rather helped clarify, make more transparent, and modify them.

Returning from Thailand first to Europe and then subsequently to the United States, gave me an opportunity to further reflect on the implications of this reshaped vocation and how to best help my students and parishioners catch a vision suitable for their particular needs and contexts. My first training in ecumenism—the theological discipline that studies and seeks to find resources for pursuing Christian unity in the midst of endless divisions and prejudices among Christian communities—has served me well in this continuing journey. Against misconceptions, neither ecumenical dialogue (inner-Christian unity) nor interfaith dialogue has as its goal the cancelling out of differences or seeking a compromise at any cost. Indeed, a fruitful result of either ecumenical or interfaith exchange could be a clarification of real differences of whose existence the parties were not aware of before the hospitable encounter. And even when the dialogue results in a consensus or convergence, the distinct identities of all parties are being honored and respected.

Ways and Means of Shaping Interfaith Sensitivity in a Theological Seminary Setting

The challenge of religious diversity and religious pluralism understandably can be treated in more than one way in higher education, depending on whether one teaches in religious studies departments or liberal arts settings or theological seminaries. My own context is the last mentioned, and therefore I am speaking here from the perspective of a typical (Christian) theological seminary that has only Christian faculty and students while at the same time seeks to widen the curriculum to include interfaith aspects as part of its ministerial training.

A key issue for the seminary setting is the availability of faculty with some interfaith experience. Particularly valuable are

those faculty members who have a working knowledge of at least one living world religion (beyond Judaism which understandably is somewhat more familiar to theologians than other faiths, although it is also the case that ancient Israel's religion based on the Torah encountered in biblical studies programs is hardly to be equated with the Judaism[s] of today).

Let me give examples from my own teaching experience, which understandably is limited to my own field of systematic theology (also called doctrinal or constructive theology). But before that a very important point whose significance is easily lost in institutional settings when the curricula are being reformed. It has to do with the *status* of the courses geared towards shaping one's vocation for the sake of the religiously pluralistic world. As long as these courses are labeled elective, they remain just that—*elective*. The impression to the student is that while perhaps worthwhile and useful, interfaith classes are not as important as, say, biblical studies, homiletics, or pastoral counseling. Only when the whole seminary community awakens to the *necessity* of including interfaith studies as an integral part of shaping ministerial vocation and calling, will the students—the whole student body, not only the ones who have already been converted to the idea!—take the issue seriously. Then, and only then, resources and a place in the curriculum are also found for organizing these courses.

Now, back to the ways I am incorporating interfaith sensitivity and knowledge as an integral part of my work both as a scholar and pedagogue in a large Protestant ecumenical seminary. Over a number of years I have worked with producing a new kind of full-scale presentation of Christian doctrine in a way that would be dialogical not only within Christian resources but also in relation to world faiths. The end result is the recently finished multivolume work titled *A Christian Theology for the*

Pluralistic World.[4] This series puts all Christian doctrines and basic teachings in a vital and mutual dialogue with Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu views. Working over the years with this exciting project brought to my mind often the celebrated late German-born Protestant theologian Paul Tillich's remark. Prophetically anticipating the future, this premier scholar who had to flee his native land to the United States because of the Nazi regime, is reported to have confessed, just few days before his death, that if he had the opportunity to rewrite his three-volume *Systematic Theology*, he would do so engaging widely other world religions. This was due to his brief exposure at the end of his life to some forms of Japanese Buddhism, as well as the influence of his famed Romanian religious studies colleague, Mircea Eliade.[5] One wonders what Tillich's *magnum opus* would have looked like had he been given a chance to rewrite it with religious plurality in mind.

The reason I am mentioning first this academic theology series when speaking of cultivating ministerial vocation and calling should be obvious: As long as the basic texts and materials used in seminary classrooms are focused merely on Christian resources, as is the case with all existing presentations of Christian doctrine, the student does not have the opportunity to begin to learn one's own faith dialogically. The student is exposed only to Christian materials. In contrast, should the student be exposed to, say, Muslim interpretations of Jesus or theistic Hindu visions of the *avatars* (divine embodiments) when speaking of Christology and incarnation, the possibility for dialogical learning would offer itself naturally. Using these new kinds of textbooks and materials

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[4] Veli-Matti Kärkäinnen, *A Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World: Christ and Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013); *Trinity and Revelation* (2014); *Creation and Humanity* (2015); *Spirit and Salvation* (2016); and *Hope and Community* (2017).

[5] Paul Tillich, *Future of Religions* (ed. Jerald Brauer; New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 91.

helps shape all theology courses I am teaching.

Indeed, over the years I have become convinced that it is not only that theological seminaries should imagine ways to plan and organize new courses in interfaith encounters — as important as those are for all institutions of higher learning. The more important way of cultivating vocation is to make diverse religious perspectives an integral part of everything studied in the curriculum. Since I am not a biblical or historical or pastoral scholar, I do not know in detail how other disciplines should execute this task. I am just wondering if, for example, the study of Scripture could be approached also from the perspective of other faith traditions. And the same with church history; I don't think history courses should necessarily be limited to the Christian tradition. And so forth.

Another way I am seeking to help students shape their vocation and calling with regard to other faiths has to do with theology courses focusing on learning about world religions and learning the basics of doing the work of comparative theology. Comparative theology means a careful comparison of beliefs, doctrines, and ideas between two or more faith traditions.[6] In

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[6] There are three interrelated yet distinct disciplines that facilitate an interfaith engagement: religious studies/comparative religions, Christian theology of religions, and comparative theology. First, *comparative religion* is a subset of the larger domain of religious studies. Religious studies employs various subdisciplines and approaches in investigating the phenomenon, spread, spiritual life, practices, teachings, and other facets of living religions. Comparative religion's focus is — as the name indicates — on a scientific comparison of religions' doctrines, teachings, and also practices. It seeks to do the work from a neutral, noncommitted point of view. Second, *Christian theology of religions*, as the name indicates, is a confessional Christian discipline. It seeks to reflect critically and sympathetically on the theological meaning and value of religions. To this task also belongs reflection on what it means for Christians to live with people of other faiths and the relationship of this faith to other traditions. Third, since theology of religions operates usually at a fairly general level, another discipline is

early 2000, soon after having joined Fuller Theological Seminary's faculty, I created a course titled "World Religions in Christian Perspective," which subsequently has been taught, and still is being taught, by a number of other instructors as well. That course consists of two uneven parts. The first part, about two-thirds, is devoted to a basic introduction to fundamental teachings and traditions of Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. The reason is obvious: most theological seminary students possess either very superficial or no knowledge at all of any other faith tradition. The latter part of the course focuses on comparative theology and gives the students an opportunity to learn the basics of comparison between Christian faith and the three other traditions. Ideally, this kind of course would be co-taught in order to ensure enough expertise in various topics; indeed, that is the way I myself have always taught it (except for the online version).

An essential part of this course involves mandatory visits to temples and sacred places of these faith traditions. Luckily these are readily available in the greater Los Angeles area where my school is located. The visits include, whenever possible, participation in the weekly service, a presentation by the local religious leader with a Q&A session, and fellowship around a meal. For most Christian theological seminary students, this

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needed, "comparative theology." Gleaning resources not only from Christian theology and theology of religions but also from comparative religion, it complements the more generic approach with an effort to consider in detail specific topics in religious traditions. Whereas comparative religion, as mentioned, seeks to be "neutral" on faith commitments and look "objectively" at the features of religious traditions, comparative theology (similarly to the theology of religions) is a confessional discipline. It is rooted in and works from the foundation of a particular faith tradition, in this case Christianity, while also learning from others. The confessional nature of comparative theology, however, does not mean that therefore comparative theology doesn't qualify as an academic discipline because, similarly to other humanistic disciplines, say history and philosophy, it follows established scholarly procedures.

might be the very first time to enter a sacred worship place other than Christian. (I have also observed how many Protestant or Anglican students have never visited even a Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox church service, and vice versa!)

Not seldom a few students raise the question of the propriety of a Christian exposing oneself to the worship experience of another faith tradition. I can recall occasional instances in which the student might have also raised doubts about the potentially negative and harmful spiritual influence an exposure to a "foreign" religion might entail. Rather than dismissing, let alone ridiculing, such doubts and fears, the instructor can take them as an excellent platform for discussing the underlying issues, expose hidden fears, correct misunderstandings, and so help cultivate interfaith sensitivity and maturity. It is likely that after graduation the student will find him or herself helping congregants deal with similar kinds of issues. Furthermore, discussions in the classroom after the visits also provide an excellent arena for processing impressions, reactions, and experiences of the students.

This course also requires the student to read some carefully chosen texts in the sacred scriptures of the three traditions. As strange as it may sound, for most seminary students this is likely the first time ever he or she opens the Holy Qur'an, let alone the extant Buddhist or Hindu writings. Even the "bible" of the common folk all over India, *Bhagavad Gita*, is virtually unknown to Christian students. Beginning to read the texts of other faiths traditions is usually a daunting task and some help is needed from the instructor for it to make sense. The reasons for the difficulty are many and well known: neither the Qur'an nor the Hindu Vedas has a plot; Hindu and Buddhist scriptures are so exceedingly vast that even to begin locating something is almost impossible for the beginner; terminology and forms of expression are also very different; and so forth. Notwithstanding the obstacles and difficulties in trying to understand the scriptures of

other faith traditions, that exercise is absolutely necessary for any meaningful attempt to get even to the basics of religions. Indeed, a key goal of this part of theological training is to help the student to read rightly religious texts. Fortunately, access to the scriptures is easy in this Internet age.[7]

Again, some Christian students may feel trepidation in opening up the Holy Qur'an or other holy scriptures. Similarly to the visits to sacred sites, this fear may turn out to become a learning and formation experience.

As said, there are a number of ways that theological seminaries—let alone other institutions of higher learning in religious and theological studies—could incorporate the interfaith aspect as a part of their vocational formation. Here I have shared some specific ways I as a theologian teaching in a typical theological seminary setting have for a long time sought to cultivate the Christian vocation and calling in ways that would open up to other faith traditions. Summatively, the benefits and fruits of such comparative learning and experiences are many:

> First, Christians can and should learn something about non-Christian religious traditions for the sake of the religious other; in fact, both the license and the imperative to do so rest on a biblical foundation. Second, Christians can and should expect to learn something about God in the course of that exploration, and the basis for such a

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[7] All important Hindu scriptures can be found on the *Internet Sacred Text Archive* (2010): http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/index.htm (accessed 3/8/19); some (mainly Mahayana) Buddhist texts can likewise be found in the same database: http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/index.htm; and a major part of the necessary portions of the Tipitaka (Theravāda) is available on the website *Access to Insight: Readings in Theravāda Buddhism* (July 30, 2017): www.accesstoinsight.com (accessed 3/8/19). The Qur'an (with several modern versions) can be easily found at *altafsir*.com: http://altafsir.com (accessed 3/8/19), and much of Hadith is available in the *Hadith Collection*: http://www.hadithcollection.com/ (accessed 3/8/19).

belief can be found in who God has revealed Godself to be and how Christians have traditionally understood that divine self-revelation. Third, Christians can and should expect that their understanding of their own faith tradition will be stretched and challenged, but at the same time deepened and strengthened through such interreligious dialogue.[8]

In Lieu of Conclusions: Dealing with Differences, Holding On to One's Own Identity

It has already been made clear that a robust orientation to the interfaith challenge is not a pretext for leaving behind or compromising Christian identity and faith convictions. We are speaking here of Christian formation taking place in a Christian setting, led by Christian faculty, forming Christian students. That said, there is no denying a deep built-in dynamic between unwavering commitment to one's own tradition and bold openness to dialogical engagement and learning from others. "In our religiously diverse context, a vital theology has to resist too tight a binding by tradition, but also the idea that religious diversity renders strong claims about truth and value impossible."[9]

Rightly understood, Christian comparative theology—as long as it is both *Christian,* rather than a "pan-religious" mixing of insights from here and there, as well as *theological,* rather than a sociological description of church practices or merely an analysis of human interpretations of human religiosity—is both an act of faith and a spiritual practice.[10] At the same time, that does not deny or compromise its status as an academic discipline, which

[8] Kristin Johnston Largen, *Baby Krishna, Infant Christ: A Comparative Theology of Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 9.

[9] Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 8.

[10] For fine insights, see Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 10–11.

follows the strict procedures and principles of any similar academic field in the humanities. Depending on the seminary's Christian distinctiveness, emphases may vary. But I have a hard time imagining how any seminary's Christian orientation would in principle thwart the enterprise.

Above I mentioned the utmost difficulty in learning to read and understand the texts of other traditions. The same difficulty of understanding and interpretation also applies to any conversation between persons of two traditions, let alone a more formal interfaith dialogue. It is ultimately about the right interpretation. As the German hermeneutical philosopher H.-G. Gadamer has reminded us, interpretation is an encounter between two "horizons," mine and yours—and true "understanding is ultimately self-understanding."[11] Rather than external, understanding is an "internal" process that also shapes us. Knowledge in religion is a process not between "subject" and "object" but rather between two "subjects" whose horizons of (self-)understanding cohere and mutually influence each other. In relation to interfaith dialogue, this means that, on the one hand, I as a Christian should not—and cannot—imagine putting aside my convictions, and that, on the other hand, those very convictions are in the process of being reshaped, sometimes even radically altered. "In understanding we are drawn into an event of truth and arrive, as it were, too late, if we want to know what we are supposed to believe."[12]

In order for the comparative approach to be *comparative*,

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[11] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2nd rev. ed.; trs. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall; New York: Continuum, [1960] 2006), 251 (emphasis removed). For reminding me of Gadamer's importance to interfaith conversation, I wish to acknowledge Kristin Johnston Sutton, "Salvation after Nagarjuna: A Reevaluation of Wolfhart Pannenberg's Soteriology in Light of a Buddhist Cosmology" (Ph.D. dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 2002), 2–16.

[12] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 484.

and hence useful and interesting, one has to resist the modernist fallacy of the "common core" and "rough parity" of religions. Modernist ideology does not honor the Otherness of the Other and thus fails to prepare the student for our diverse and pluralistic world. A truly dialogical mode, rather than denying differences, is an essential asset in the pursuit of truth and conviction. This is an important lesson to our students and a value to be minded in our training that seeks to resource students to engage an interfaith dialogue in their own settings. The German theologian Jürgen Moltmann puts it well: Dialogue has to be about the question of truth, even if no agreement about the truth can be reached. For consensus is not the goal of the dialogue. . . . If two people say the same thing, one of them is superfluous. In the interfaith dialogue which has to do with what is of vital and absolute concern to men and women—with the things in which they place the whole trust of their hearts—the way is already part of the goal.[13]

Moltmann rightly contends that only those people are capable of dialogue—"merit dialogue," as he puts it—who "have arrived at a firm standpoint in their own religion, and who enter into dialogue with the resulting self-confidence."[14] Thus, "it is only if we are at home in our own religion that we shall be able to encounter the religion of someone else. The person who falls victim to the relativism of the multicultural society may be capable of dialogue, but that person does not merit dialogue."[15]

What the willingness to engage the religious Other entails is that one is willing to step out of one's own comfort zone. The human intuition and desire is to stick with those who are likeminded. Everything foreign and strange scares us. An astute

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[13] Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology* (tr. Margaret Kohl; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 19–20.

[14] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 18.

[15] Moltmann, *Experiences in Theology*, 18–19.

theological training in a safe seminary setting may resource and empower the student for such a life-long adventure to step out. Cultivating interfaith sensitivity is thus much more than merely conveying information about other religions or even teaching the skills of an interfaith dialogue, as important as they may be. It is a matter of attitudinal formation—to which belong the exposing of one's fears and strengthening the will and desire to venture into new experiences. The leading American comparative theologian, the Jesuit Francis X. Clooney, puts it succinctly:

> If we are attentive to the diversity around us, near us, we must deny ourselves the easy confidences that keep the other at a distance. But, as believers, we must also be able to defend the relevance of the faith of our community, deepening our commitments even alongside other faiths that are flourishing nearby. We need to learn from other religious possibilities, without slipping into relativist generalizations. The tension between open-mindedness and faith, diversity and traditional commitment, is a defining feature of our era, and neither secular society nor religious authorities can make simple choices before us.[16]

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[16] Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 7.

Formation and Vocation for Leadership

Scott Cormode

Seminary education is calibrated for a world that no longer exists and it is not presently designed to develop a capacity for innovation and agility. A generation ago, the goal of a seminary education was to create what one scholar called "*theological camels*."[1] A school pumped a student full of knowledge and then sent the graduate out into the desert hoping she had learning enough to last a lifetime. And for much of the twentieth century, theological camels thrived. Camels are custom-built for a particular environment and are exactly the right mode of transportation if you are traveling a predictable route from one oasis to the next. It makes sense that schools were once calibrated for a predictable world.

But the world our graduates will now enter is too unpredictable to count on the camel model of ministry. Camels do not have the adaptability to survive in a changing world. The world our grads will enter will require Christian leaders to be

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[1] The quote comes from the Classics scholar James O'Donnell. As an early leader in the area of teaching with technology and as a leading scholar of historic Christianity (specializing in Augustine), the Lilly Endowment commissioned him to write a paper in the 1990s on how the coming rise of the technology should influence theological education. The paper came out in 1996, before most seminaries had websites or even email. O'Donnell chose to write about the vulnerabilities of theological education and the potential for technology to address those vulnerabilities. Sadly, the vulnerabilities remain. James J. O'Donnell, "High-Tech Christianity," unpublished paper (1996), §7 (emphasis mine): http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/texts/lilly.html (accessed 12/12/19).

agile and imaginative. Camels are calibrated to thrive in one very specific environment. But, over the next sand dune, our grads may find not an oasis or even more sand; instead, they might enter a rain forest or a barrio. Our graduates will need to respond to changes in the world, changes that they cannot predict. When I was a seminary student twenty-five years ago, no one talked to me about the Internet; the World Wide Web as we know it was not created until six months after I graduated. But the world I entered has been transformed by the web. In the same way, there are changes coming in this world that none of us can foresee. The grads of the future will have to develop the agility to respond to whatever changes are over the next sand dune.

Let me point to a specific graduate. Petra entered ministry as the model candidate. She grew up in a prestigious church and attended a well-known college. She stormed through an Ivy League seminary with great grades. She impressed the Candidates Committee of her presbytery with her answers to complex theological questions. After graduation, she won a plum assignment as an associate pastor at a large, multi-staff church—an assignment that put her on track to one day lead a large congregation of her own. I met her because she was the youngest person to participate in a small study group sponsored by her denomination. She was on the fast track. And all this worked great for her, right up until the point where she washed out of ministry in the first few years of that plum assignment. Petra was exactly what seminary education hoped to produce; and that is exactly the problem.

Petra was (and is) tremendously reflective. And she remained a part of that denominational study even when she packed her bags, quit the ministry, and moved back to her hometown. Petra took responsibility for her own failings. But, when pressed to see herself as the product of the system that her denomination had created, she wrote a stellar paper for us on what her experience tells us about preparation for ministry. In her

reflections, Petra said that seminary education "is largely based on the academic model, which does not serve the pastor-to-be or the person in the pew." She explained where the "academic model" failed by describing both the seminary and denominational processes, "The preparation process rewards *textual skills*, but ministry requires *relational skills*. I was told I was a model candidate. But I realize now that it was because I was good at working with texts. I may have been a good candidate, but the preparation process did not teach me the relational skills necessary for ministry."[2]

She did not have *the agility to connect the texts she read with the people she led*. Indeed, she was taught to put more energy into understanding texts than people. But she discovered when she began to lead that people are constantly changing and that her job was to find a new reading of Scripture that addressed the lives of the people entrusted to her care in just the same way that Martin Luther built the Reformation around a new reading of the Book of Romans and Ralph Winter build the contemporary missionary movement around a new reading of Jesus's parting words. But they each did that because they realized that the world had changed—and that the people that live in a changing world need new insights from Scripture.

After Petra wrote the paper, we talked further and she described how these difficulties played out. The longings and losses she experienced in the church position were threaded through a series of role conflicts. As an associate pastor with responsibilities for youth and families, she supervised a youth director and she reported to a lead pastor.[3] Listening to the youth

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[2] Emphasis in original. Petra is a pseudonym. These reflections come from a talk she gave to our national study group. When I asked her for a copy of her remarks, she sent me the manuscript, titled, "An Analysis of the Preparation for Ministry for the Presbyterian Church USA: An Appeal for Flesh and Blood."

[3] This role conflict is, of course, a classic example of the "middle-

made her realize that teenagers seemed to need something very different than the senior pastor wanted the church to provide. In other words, her congregation was calibrated to serve the needs of youth that no longer existed. Her responsibilities to the teens and to the youth minister clashed with her responsibility to enact what the lead pastor and the church board wanted. The youth minister wanted to serve the youth entrusted to his care and the lead pastor (and the board) wanted to replicate a ministry from a by-gone era. She needed the imagination to create a way to respond to both needs. Likewise, her role as a pastor competed with her role as a wife and her longing to be a mother. And, this created tremendous uncertainty. She lacked the agility to mediate the role conflict. So she retreated to what she knew best; she wrote and reflected, isolated from people, unsure how to act. She did exactly what her seminary education prepared her to do, and that was the problem. *Petra did not have the agility to serve the needs of her ever-changing people within the constraints of a traditional congregation.*

The problem, of course, is that we live between the needs of an agile future and the demands of Petra's past. We have inherited a ministry system designed to produce plodding camels for Christendom. Until that system changes (and, as a seminary professor, I can point to places where it is changing – especially at my school), the ministry as we know it will be calibrated for a world that no longer exists. *We need a way to instill agility into a community of pastors prepared to minister in a world of predictability that no longer exists.*

This problem of stumbling agility is not restricted to

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manager's dilemma." For an intriguing discussion of how the trend toward "flat organizations" exacerbates the middle manager's dilemma, see this article by esteemed Stanford scholar Harold J. Leavitt in Harvard Business School's *Working Knowledge* series, Harold J. Leavitt, "The Plight of Middle Managers," *HBS Working Knowledge* (December 13, 2004): http://hbswk.hbs.edu/archive/4537.html (accessed 12/12/19).

theological education. It is the product of our educational system. Think of the educational system as the place where we lay out our expectations; it is the place where it is easiest to see the world we have calibrated ourselves to serve. In fact, this lack of agility is most common in our best graduates, according to Tom Kelley and David Kelley.[4] The Kelley brothers are among the most respected voices in the world of innovation. David Kelley is the founder of two innovation icons: the innovation incubator firm IDEO and the Stanford School of Design (commonly called the d.school). Tom Kelley is a partner at IDEO and has written extensively on innovation. In a recent article, the brothers describe four "chronic fears" that prevent people from exercising the kind of creativity that is necessary for innovation. We will discuss the four phobias in a moment. But before we do, it is important to see the effect that the article had. It sparked a discussion in business schools about the readiness of graduates to do the agile work of innovation.

A business-school professor, Hilary Austen, begins one such article with the question, "What do we expect of a good student?"[5] In other words, what is our mental model of educational success? The article describes the ideal b-school student; but it could have been describing Petra or any other model Christian leader. We want "a willing, intelligent mind,

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[4] Tom Kelley and David Kelley, *Creative Confidence: Unleashing the Creative Potential within Us All* (New York: Random House, 2013). The following paragraphs discuss the Kelley brothers' recent book which is summarized in a number of shorter venues, including: "Reclaim Your Creative Confidence," *Harvard Business Review* (December 2012): 1–5; "Creative Confidence: The Path from Blank Page to Insight," *Rotman Management* (Winter 2014): 17–21; and David Kelley, "How to Build Your Creative Confidence," TED video, 11:31 (March 2012): http://www.ted.com/talks/david_kelley_how_to_build_your_creativ e_confidence?language=en (accessed 12/12/19).

[5] See, for example, Hilary Austen, "The Educator's Dilemma: Engaging Students in Knowledge Creation," *Rotman Management* (Fall 2013): 23–27. The following quotations are from p. 23 of this article.

diligently applied to coursework. Reliable and rapid recall. A calm, competent response to the pressure of testing. What else? Perhaps a disciplined mindset that assures homework will be turned in on time. The rigor to complete work correctly. An attentive and cooperative attitude in class." These are the characteristics of an ideal student. "In the prevailing model of education," Austen recognizes, "that kind of student will make straight A's all the way." Even in the most rigorous programs, "these students will move to the head of the class." Such a graduate will then thrive in church interviews because she fits the mental model of a Christian leader that we think will thrive in the world that we think we serve. Petra was just such a student.

Then Austen makes her key point. "The good student, the ones who excel in the current system, are skidding when they hit today's streets." Austen draws the same conclusion about business schools that Petra did about her own experience in theological education. "The trouble with the education system isn't that it isn't doing a good job. It's doing a great job" churning out graduates who embody the ideal that we think the world needs. We pretend that the world is predictable. We think that Christian leaders should create guaranteed outcomes. But *the leaders who crave predictability are stumbling*. And the Kelley brothers can tell us why.

Kelley and Kelley identify four fears—they call them "phobias"—that erode creativity and hobble innovation. We fuel these fears when we condition people to expect a predictable world. And, as we will see, these fears come out not just in our leaders but also in our congregations. They are:

1. The fear of the messy unknown.
2. The fear of being judged.
3. The fear of the first step.
4. The fear of losing control.

Let me explain each of the four so that we are clear about the problem. "*The fear of the messy unknown*" refers to the

uncertainty of being faced with a problem without clear parameters. We say that grads need the agility to invent their futures and that Petra needed the imagination to reinvent youth ministry in order to serve the people entrusted to her care within the parameters of a traditional church. But we don't give (indeed, we cannot give) either of them clear parameters for what that would look like. The outcome we expect from them is messy because there are no clear guidelines and they are unknown because neither our grads nor Petra have established examples to emulate.

"*The fear of being judged*" means that each of them has to experiment their way to an unknown future in full view of an audience that will react harshly to any misstep. They are each rookies in that they are new to a ministry that they need to invent. We counsel leaders to strive to avoid making their rookie mistakes in public. But they often don't know how to create the white space[6] to experiment on the margins. And they end up making mistakes in public, in environments that do not give them the grace to make the mistakes every rookie makes.

"*The fear of the first step*" refers to the fear that comes with thinking that in order to take one step a person has to work out all the steps. Any first step feels like it sets a person on a path that curtails all the other options. But the problem is that the path is not clear. If a camel were walking from one oasis to the next, then there would be a well-worn path. But the whole point of talking about agility is to say that there is not a clear path. A grad will have to blaze her own trail or figure it out as she goes along. And it is much harder to take that first step into the desert when you have no guarantee that there will be an oasis before you run out of water.

And, finally, "*the fear of losing control*" is about the way that

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[6] Mark Maletz and Nitni Nohria, "Managing in White Space," *Harvard Business Review* (February 2001): 102–111.

humans handle fear; we pretend we have control. But none of us really has control. This is a theological statement. We manage our lack of faith by pretending that we have enough control that we really don't need to rely on God—where "relying on God" means putting ourselves in a situation where we can no longer create our own destinies. Together these four phobias conspire to create inaction. They mean that the present crop of clergy likely has little experience with agility.

The four fears have something in common, especially for aces like Petra. They push against the strategies that people like Petra have developed for dealing with projects and assignments. Control is the key for such model students. They want clear expectations, clear deadlines, and clear means with clear ends. They crave the predictability that such clarity creates. But the world that is just now being born specifically precludes this kind of certainty. Petra wants to be a theological camel. She wants to have a clearly defined route between one oasis and the next. She wants to know when she leaves one waterhole that she has learning enough stored in her hump to get her to the next one. She wants predictability—because she knows that, if she has a predictable set of expectations, she can deliver a predictable (and satisfactory) set of outcomes. *Petra wanted exactly the predictable environment that our grads know they cannot expect.* Petra washed out because the world had changed and she could not adapt. Petra needed to innovate; our grads need to develop agility.

As hard as it is to develop agility, there is one other ability that innovation requires. *Innovation also requires discipline*. We don't normally think of agility and discipline as going together. We caricature agility to the point where we think agile people have no plan, and we distort discipline to mean stubbornly following a plan. Neither is true. Discipline has to do with follow through, not just planning. A disciplined person can meet her own expectations. She can decide to do something and then have confidence that she will see it through to being done.

Agility and discipline are connected. *Preparation makes you agile*. A jazz musician can hop around because she has prepared for hours. A baker can confidently make a recipe he has never seen because he has made all the elements in the past. And a dancer practices elements that he can combine in new and unexpected ways. Experience allows someone to say to himself, "I've seen something like that before, even if I've never seen that exact thing." Or think of athletics. There is a saying in the sports world, "Champions are made in the off season." The disciplined preparation of the off season allows an athlete to respond with agility to the unforeseen challenges that come in a difficult game. Theological education is designed to prepare leaders for their callings. It will need to become formation for vocation.

There has been of late much discussion about vocation and calling, with the terms often used interchangeably.[7] The

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[7] The books that have most influenced my understanding of vocation are: Lee Hardy, "Our Work, God's Providence: The Christian Concept of Vocation," *The Fabric of this World: Inquiries into Calling, Career Choice, and the Design of Human Work* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 44–77 (esp. 42–67); Mark Labberton, *Called: The Crisis and Promise of Following Jesus Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014); Timothy Keller, "Introduction," *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 18–30; Kathleen A. Cahalan, "Introduction: Finding Life's Purposes in God's Purposes," *Calling All Years Good: Christian Vocation throughout Life's Seasons* (eds. Kathleen A. Cahalan and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 1–11; Jane Patterson, "Resurrection and God's Vindication," *Calling All Years Good*, 198–99; David Setran and Chris Kiesling, "Vocation: Purpose and Providence" *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 111–38; and Susan Maros, "'I'm Just American': Facilitating Seminary Students' Reflections Regarding the Impact of Whiteness on Vocational Formation," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 17 (Fall 2018): 68–89. From an African-American perspective, see Howard Thurman, "What Shall I do with my Life?" *Callings: Twenty Centuries of Christian Wisdom on Vocation* (ed. William C. Placher; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 385–89. For a crucial

discussion often begins with the reformers. Five hundred years ago, Martin Luther argued that we have two responsibilities as Christians—two callings.[8] The first call is the call from God to come and follow;[9] it is the call to discipleship. And until a person answers that call, she is not really a Christian. But as soon as she answers God's first call, a second call comes hard on its heels. The second call is the call to our neighbor—to love and serve that neighbor. The call to God always involves the call to our neighbor.

Luther tied the two calls to the two great commandments: to love God with all your heart, mind, soul, and spirit, and to love your neighbor as yourself. And he said they create the obligations that define us. To God we owe faith; and to our neighbor we owe love. And this love propels us out into the world as ambassadors to stand between God and the people God calls us to serve. "The Christian life," Luther said, "sends you to people, to those that need your works."[10] God does not send us out to some generic,

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perspective on the multi-layered commitments women encounter when dealing with vocation questions, see Bonnie Miller-McLemore, "Contemplation in the Midst of Chaos: Contesting the Maceration of the Theological Teacher," *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher* (eds. L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 48–74. From Asian-American perspective on "pastoral identity" that can translate to any formed vocation, see Samuel Park, "Pastoral Identity in a New Paradigm," *Pastoral Identity as Social Construction* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), 1–29. And, for a multi-faith perspective, see Kathleen A. Cahalan and Douglas J. Schuurman, eds., *Calling in Today's World: Voices from Eight Faith Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

[8] Hardy, *Fabric of this World,* 46.

[9] Labberton's *Called* is particularly articulate in explaining how the first calling placed on any Christian is the call to discipleship.

[10] Hardy, quoting Martin Luther, *Fabric of this World*, 51. Miroslav Volf argues that Luther inappropriately intertwines a calling with a job—creating what Jürgen Moltmann calls "the consecration of the *vocational-occupational structure.*" Miroslav Volf, quoting Jürgen Moltmann, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1991), 107–8. In addition, William Placher points out that

impersonal entity that we will collectively call a "neighbor." God sends us out—just as God sent Jesus—to a particular people in a particular time and a particular place (as, for example, Jesus sent the seventy in Luke 10). That is why the Bible calls every one of us ambassadors, because we are all sent from God to a people. No matter your station in life—and not just if you are a minister— God invites you to be an ambassador, with people entrusted to your care.

This call from God changes, then, our mental model of "vocation." My vocation is not about me and your vocation is not about you. Luther suggests that our calling is not defined by our giftedness or our interests or our "passions." He says that our calling as Christians is defined by "those that need our works."

Your vocation, then, is a calling to a people entrusted to your care. Christian leaders do not have "followers"; only Jesus has followers. Instead, they have people entrusted to their care. There are three theological reasons for recasting the mental models of leadership and vocation to be about a people entrusted to your care. First, it emphasizes God's role as the one doing the entrusting. The Second Corinthians passage that names us each as ambassadors begins by emphasizing that God was in the world reconciling the world in Christ Jesus. Everything we do derives from what God has done, is doing, and will do. And by entrusting those people to us God calls us to imitate God by caring for them. Second, it emphasizes that we are stewards of people who already belong to God. The people entrusted to our care are God's people, made in the image of God. They are not my people, made to accomplish my goals. They belong to God. And, third, it says that

Luther's notion of station is rooted in a static view of society that related women and peasants to marginal status and baptized a wealthy man's standing. We will then need to reference his work but shift the usage of the word "station" so that it takes on a more contemporary meaning that allows for social mobility. Thus, we draw inspiration from Luther without adopting all of his assumptions. Cf. Placher, *Callings,* 206.

the measure of good work is not my intentions. It is the effect my work has on the people entrusted to my care.

This new view of vocation complements a new mental model for leadership. Amidst the factions in Corinth, Paul "planted, Apollos water, but God gave the increase" (1 Cor 3:6). This is our model for leadership. The most important work is what God does. What, then, is the work of leadership? Planting and watering. We create an environment conducive to bearing fruit and then we turn our people over to God. The people belong to God and it is God who gives the increase.

Thus, a person's vocation or a congregation's mission becomes a calling not to a task but to a people. The people may be a large group—in the way that a missionary might be called to the Berber people of North Africa. Or the people might be a parish—in the way that a congregation might be called to the people of the west end of a town or the neighborhood around a particular inner-city park.[11] Or it might be more of an individual call. I might be called to care for the co-workers who share the cubicle space in my department at my company. Or I might be called to parent the children entrusted to my care[12]—or to care for a group of elderly people. There are as many kinds of callings as there are groups of people. But either way, the calling is not about my gifts, my passions, or my tasks; it is about the people entrusted to my care. *My purpose derives from my people not my passions or my plans.*

God gave me daughters. Long before I was married, I

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[11] Cf. Ammerman on the distinction between "niche congregations" and "parish congregations." Nancy Tatom Ammermon, *Congregation & Community* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 34–36, cf. 384n58

[12] Kate Harris, "Motherhood as Vocation," *The Washington Institute for Faith, Vocation, and Culture*: https://washingtoninst.org /motherhood-as-vocation/ (accessed 12/12/19); cf. Kate Harris, "Navigating the Challenges of Career, Motherhood, and Identity," Vimeo video, 26:18 (2015): https://vimeo.com/121758875 (accessed 12/12/19).

pictured someday playing basketball with my children. I am passionate about basketball; I still play twice a week. And the fact that I happened to fall in love with a tall woman only strengthened (heightened) the hope that I would someday teach my children to play basketball. The fact that my children were girls was not a problem. I would have been happy to teach them basketball. But it was not to be. My two daughters looked at their mom and they looked at their dad, and they decided that Mom was much more interesting (I agree). Mom knits, and sews, and bakes; Mom is a computer programmer. And my girls have no interest in sports. Instead they like fashion and food—and science. So what did I do as a dad?

I had to follow the interests of the children God entrusted to my care. I had to cultivate strengths that did not come naturally to me. I had to adopt their passions; I could not force them to follow mine. That means that when we talk together about fashion, I can now participate in a conversation about pencil skirts, ruched sleeves, and boyfriend jackets (although not together). And I can talk about jewel tones and "cutting along the bias"—although it still amuses them that I cannot distinguish warm colors from cool colors. If my girls had chosen basketball, my wife would know the proper way to hedge a pick-and-roll. Instead, I can extoll the virtues of *addi Turbo* knitting needles. I do not care much about fashion, but I am passionate about my daughters.[13]

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[13] The same is true for my daughters' love of science. One daughter is pursuing a PhD in Physics at Ohio State. She is working in an area of physics called "condensed matter." I, of course, do not understand it. But, during her first year of grad school, I would spend time on Tuesday nights watching YouTube videos so that I could be conversant enough to ask her questions about her work. The sad truth is that the more videos I watched about electron spin and superposition, the less I really understood. But understanding physics was never my goal. Understanding my daughter (and having her feel understood), that was what mattered.

These are the people that God entrusted to my care. I did not pick them; God gave them to me as a gift. And that gift created for me an obligation. I had to become whom my daughters needed me to be. So my calling to be a father and my passion for the daughters entrusted to my care required me to develop "passions" that did not come naturally. It is not about me. It is about the people entrusted to my care. *Your calling is not about you; it will require you to become who your people need you to be.*

Formation and Vocation (Online)
for Ministry Leadership

Amy Drennan and Tod Bolsinger

A renowned scholar and a trained spiritual director are part of a panel discussion about spiritual formation and theological education. After the scholar's impassioned plea for returning to a more formational approach to theological education that is rooted in robust experiences of Christian community, he turns to the spiritual director who affirms his comment enthusiastically.

"But," the spiritual director says sadly, "how about all of those people who can't be in a seminary community because they have to take classes online? How can they be truly spiritually formed if they can't literally be face-to-face with each other?"

The scholar sighs, "That is an unfortunate reality today. As we know, online education is really the transfer of information and just can't be truly about formation . . . at least anything substantive and lasting."

Regrettably, this presumption reflects a belief held by many faculty and administrators in the current context of theological education This chapter outlines Fuller Theological Seminary's efforts to challenge the notion that online formational education is unattainable or inferior to that offered in a face-to-face, residential setting—and what we learned in doing so. The authors of this chapter argue that online education offers distinct advantages for the theological, spiritual, and vocational formation of students, especially ministry leaders, who remain engaged in their current Christian ministry contexts—something that is even more critical in an age of disruption because of social-distancing

and the nearly universal application of online technologies to education. We explore this assertion through the lenses of ecological development, embedded and embodied formation, and the reconception of online leadership formation as a disruptive process that uniquely strengthens a student's vocational identity and leadership competence.

Our Shifting Context

Because the pandemic of 2020 thrust every institution into online education, it became immediately clear that the impact of the virus revealed "underlying conditions" in many spheres of life even beyond personal health. In the realm of leadership formation, recent studies by McKinsey and *Harvard Business Review* have raised questions about the effectiveness of most leadership development programs in the U.S and European graduate education.[1] Lauded and expensive MBA programs fall short of meeting the expectations for developing the kinds of leaders that corporations, organizations, and governments expect because they divorce theory from practice, emphasize classroom learning from actual leadership contexts, and value information over ethical discernment and leadership capacity.[2] Similar complaints are often heard by pastors and Christian leaders about the ineffectiveness of seminary education for the actual work of congregational leadership. Students and alumni of Fuller's academic programs have insisted that their seminary education did not adequately prepare them with the capacity to

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[1] Pierre Gurdjian and Thomas Halbeisen and Kevin Lane, "Why leadership-development programs fail" (January 2014): https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/leadership/why-leadership-development-programs-fail (accessed 8/21/19).

[2] Michael Beer and Magnus Finnstrom and Derek Schrader, "Why Leadership Training Fails—and What to Do About It," *Harvard Business Review* (October 2016): https://hbr.org/2016/10/why-leadership-training-fails-and-what-to-do-about-it (accessed 8/21/19).

theologically reflect on real life ministry problems nor develop spiritual and personal rhythms and practices to sustain a life of ministry. James Smith argues that current models of Christian education must shift from merely disseminating theological information to the fundamental task of forming students—"a task of shaping and creating a certain kind of people."[3] This shift highlights the challenge for the leaders of Christian universities and seminaries. Theological education must create learning experiences that integrate the dispensation of valuable theological information with the process of shaping students' theological reflection, personal relationships, and embodied practices as a means of spiritual and vocational preparation for their changing world and their specific callings.

Amidst theological educators' task to reformulate theological education, however, is also the challenging reality that our educational context is radically shifting beneath our feet. Studies show that even before the pandemic of 2020, 6 million U.S. students (29.7% of all higher education students) were enrolled in at least one distance education course, and of all students taking at least one online class, almost half (48%) were taking *only* online classes.[4] Gregory Jones and Nathan Jones[5] assert that the digital revolution is pressing theological institutions to reconsider new and innovative approaches to their formational education through online delivery formats, something that has become even

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[3] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 26.

[4] I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seamen, "Digital learning compass: Distance education enrollment report 2017," *Babson Survey Research Group* (May 2017): https://onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/digtiallearningcompassenrollment2017.pdf (accessed 1/24/20).

[5] L. Gregory Jones and Nathan Jones, "L. Gregory Jones and Nathan Jones: Deep trends affecting Christian institutions," *Faith & Leadership* (October 22, 2012): https://www.faithandleadership.com/l-gregory-jones-and-nathan-jones-deep-trends-affecting-christian-institutions (accessed 8/23/19).

more apparent since institutions were forced to go online in Spring 2020. To be enduring and formative, it is not enough to simply use technology, these approaches, the author notes, must continually engage creative experiments that are grounded in traditioned endeavors. The prevalence and power of online education will continue to affect a number of domains within higher education, including admissions practices; course content, quality, and pricing; and the declining necessity for residential campuses.[6] These seismic contextual shifts are pressing leaders of theological institutions to re-examine approaches to formational education by engaging online delivery formats.

What is true across the country is even more so at Fuller Seminary, where the online student enrollment grew from approximately 800 students in 2013 to 2000 students by the end of 2019; there has been a 17% year over year gain in our online population between 2013–2018.[7] Additionally, in the past year, the total units taken on the residential Pasadena campus decreased 13% compared to the previous Fall, while total units taken online increased by 7%.[8] While our faculty and administrators have developed some degree of competence at delivering content-laden courses online over this time period, a persistent assumption often voiced is that the most effective spiritual and vocational development needs to be an in-person, residential experience (much like the argument of the renowned theologian above). Even advocates for "flipped classrooms," formational curricula, and educational innovation have wondered aloud whether the kind of spiritual and vocational formation needed for

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[6] Jeffrey J. Selingo, *College (Un)Bound: The Future of Higher Education and What It Means for Students* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2013).

[7] Tommy Lister, personal communication to Amy Drennan, February 2, 2020.

[8] Internal Reports of Fall 2019 and Fall 2018 Enrollment Data, Fuller Theological Seminary.

a life of ministry leadership—marked by emerging clarity in vocation that is developed and continually revised to respond to a changing world and ministry context—could be cultivated in an online class space.

Innovative Online Formation Efforts at Fuller Seminary

In the Fall of 2015, Fuller Seminary introduced new Integrative Studies (IS) courses into the Master's level curriculum in the schools of Theology and Intercultural studies. These courses were the result of curricular revisions that sought (among other factors) to emphasize "formative" and "integrative" efforts more intentionally and were designed in response to two data points: a) students reported difficulty translating academic knowledge into their everyday practice of Christian faith and the work of ministry, and b) students regularly described their seminary experience in terms of disciplinary fragmentation. Based on the theological conviction that vocation is "formed not found,"[9] these courses teach students to listen and respond to the call (Latin, *vocare*) of God by integrating their academic study, ministry experiences, and embodied spiritual practices into a reflective and comprehensive "Rule of Life." This pedagogical process is intended to form the capacity in students to discern and be shaped for their vocations over a lifetime of experiences, in an ever-changing church, and within particular ministry contexts.

Additionally, each IS course incorporates mentor-led Vocation Formation (VF) groups, which provide a communal "laboratory" in which to practice these disciplines and to discuss strategies for integrating their academic learning with ordinary life. As the VF office responded to the disruption of rapidly expanding online education, we made new discoveries in

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[9] Tod Bolsinger, "Formed, Not Found," *Fuller Studio* (2014): https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/formed-not-found/(accessed 8/22/2019).

providing relevant and effective *formational* education in an online modality.

In 2017, the VF department translated these courses to an online modality by determining the key ingredients that were necessary for the ongoing spiritual, personal, and vocational formation of seminary students—regardless of the medium through which this was facilitated. We assumed the veracity of Fuller professor Erin Dufault-Hunter's mantra, "Good pedagogy is good pedagogy regardless of modality,"[10] meant that we could shift the conversation of *how* we can possibly teach—let alone form—students online to the discussion of how we teach and form students, well, period. Inevitably, moving into the online space caused our office to examine and critique all of our formational teaching methods. To this point, Stephen Lowe and Mary Lowe argue, "Spiritual formation is not a magical occurrence resulting from the presence of Christians gathered together in the same place, whether online or on campus."[11] As we reflected on relevant resources and our personal experiences in the formation of leaders, we determined that the three integral aspects of our formation offerings were a) reflection, b) relationships, and c) practices. The following section explores each of these ingredients in greater depth.

Reflection

Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal note that the changes that take place in one's learning always involve a process of listening and self-reflection, writing, "Experience, one often hears, is the best teacher, but that is true only if you reflect on it and extract its

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[10] Amy Drennan and Erin Dufault-Hunter, "ATS Innovation Grant Summary 2017-2018 Fuller Theological Seminary" (paper, The Association of Theological Schools Conference, Denver, CO, June 2018).

[11] Stephen D. Lowe and Mary E. Lowe, *Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age: Spiritual Growth through Online Education* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 85.

real lessons."[12] This reflective learning assumes a praxis model for education and pedagogy. Praxis is "a continual movement from experience to reflection and study, and then on to new actions and experiences."[13] This type of formation assumes that students do not come to seminary as a blank slate, but rather have already been formed through—and are currently embedded in—the enactment of various practices in their communal contexts. The process of vocational formation asks students to reflect on their own history of formation and engage in new learning for the purpose of creating new actions and experiences that helps a student discern their God-given vocation. This reflection includes an understanding of what students currently know and the context they inhabit, where they want to be, and what needs to shift to get to that changed state. Without theological reflection in their seminary classes, students are inhibited in their ability to self-correct and adjust their mental models.[14]

This type of reflection initiates the process of change; students lay the groundwork of exposing personal assumptions and mental frameworks through which they have been operating. A praxis model of learning was critical to help students build the capacity to properly identify the personal and communal forces that have shaped their current formation and engage the necessary resources to embody new and faithful practices. After personally reflecting on their experience, students are then invited into a relationship with others to continue their reflection in small groups.

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[12] Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *How Great Leaders Think: The Art of Reframing* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 12.

[13] Mark Branson and Juan F. Martinez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practice Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011).

[14] Scott Cormode, "The Next Faithful Step: Christian Leaders Transform Mental Models," *Fuller Theological Seminary* (September 10, 2018):fuller.edu/next-faithful-step/resources/christian-leaders-trans-form-mental-models (accessed 8/22/19).

Relationships

A second essential ingredient to our formation process is the integration of peer and mentor relationships as a primary medium to integrate academic content and theological insights based on the process of reflection discussed above. Cultivating safe and trusting spaces allows students to verbalize their perceptions and meaningfully submit them to a process of deconstruction, reimagination, or reinforcement through relationships with peers and mentors. By putting their reflection and experience into dialogue with others from differing communities, students gain a window into the assumptions of their own social location and background. When these relationships are leveraged, mental models and frameworks within each participant begin to be challenged. As Ronald Heifetz has written, we are not changed just through "looking in a mirror, you change by encountering differences."[15] And those challenges, coming in a space of relational trust and safety allows for the reconsideration of both mental models and practices.

The peer-to-peer relationships are not the only critical pathway to communal reflection—the presence of VF Group leaders is also vital to the formative process. Group leaders provide expertise in the form of knowledge and experience and guide/coach students through formation experiences by modeling relational dynamics such as listening, question-asking, and offering guidance rather than personal opinion. Additionally, group leaders work alongside professors to function as catalysts to spark formative conversation about surfacing conflicts, group dynamics, or capturing a new idea that arises in a group.

Finally, these relationships are important because of God's

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[15] Ronald A. Heifetz, "Leadership, Adaptability, Thriving," YouTube video, 1:10:01 (November 18, 2009): www.youtube.com /watch?v=CSZId1VlYxc.

triune presence. As Tod Bolsinger writes, "The doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that the God who made us in his image considered his own human creation "not good" until he created a second one for relationship (Gen 1:27). The doctrine of the Trinity teaches us that since God is a relationship, then we "image" God only in relationship."[16] If we have been created in community, as the disciples and the early church testify, then as the people of God, we grow and are formed in community also. Communal reflection is not just about the interpersonal reflection of the community, but also an experience of the transformation of the triune God in that reflection.

Practices

A final key ingredient to Fuller's process of formation is the students' intentional engagement with specific Christian practices. To unpack this aspect of our work, it is necessary to first identify the theological anthropology that guides our understanding of how people change. Employing Smith's[17] framework, we understand that humans are primarily liturgical animals whose identities are shaped through our embodied life in the world. Liturgies, according to Smith, "shape and constitute our identities by forming our most fundamental desires and our most basic attunement to the world. In short, liturgies make us certain kinds of people, and what defines us is what we love."[18] Since liturgies are the driving force behind how human identity is shaped, attention to the various liturgies in which humans are embedded becomes critical. But what constitutes a liturgy? Liturgy is the constellation of practices that together form people to desire a particular version of the good life.

If liturgies shape human identity and the constellation of

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[16] Tod E. Bolsinger, *It Takes a Church to Raise a Christian: How the Community of God Transforms Lives* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004).

[17] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*.

[18] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 25.

practices constitute liturgies, then it is necessary to define what we mean by practices. Fuller's understanding of practices draws on the work of the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre. Scott Cormode provides a helpful synthesis of MacIntyre's definition of practices:

> Practices (a) are communally-defined, (b) are historically-rooted within a tradition, (c) have what McIntyre calls 'internal goods' that embody the cardinal virtues of the tradition, and (d) have standards of excellence that separate formative engagement in a practice from destructive participation in the practice (with the key distinction being that formative engagement reinforces values and destruction participation erodes values).[19]

Again, even practices are intrinsically relational. Christians do not ordinarily worship alone, for example, but are gathered together—both physically and historically across time—in our practice of worship. As such, practices are historically rooted in how a particular community has participated in the activities that constitute a practice across time.

Humans are liturgical animals whose identities are shaped primarily through the practices they engage in in response to the belief that God continues to call through the Spirit. Therefore, the concept of *calling* or *vocation* becomes central to our theological anthropology. Within this nexus of liturgy, practice, and calling, it becomes clear that Christian formation requires practices that help students discern God's call and shape their identities into Christ likeness in ways appropriate for their own context. Fuller Theological Seminary's theory of change is a developmental process of Vocational Formation that leads to a sense of Vocational Coherence that builds the capacity for Vocational Agility. Guided by ancient Christian practices, through the

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[19] Scott Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense: Christian Leaders as Spiritual Interpreters* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 97–98.

empowerment of the Spirit, Fuller students are brought through a process of discerning their vocation in a manner that results in deeper union with and conformity to Christ amidst the change and flux of our current world.

The process of identifying the key ingredients of our department's work to facilitate the formation of students—regardless of modality—helped us to distill those aspects that were critical to translate to an online setting. Incorporating various frameworks then guided the adaptation of our formation courses to this alternative modality. The following section reviews the frameworks of ecological development as formation, embedded and embodied formation, and disruptive formation.

Key Frameworks to Inform Fuller's Online Formation
An ecological perspective on spiritual formation

Jack Balswick, Pamela King, and Kevin Reimer[20] draw on a biblical view of relationality with the triune God to explain their integrated model of human development. The authors propose that conforming to the particularity and relationality of the Holy Trinity requires a reciprocating self that is in relationship with God, humankind, and God's creation. The authors explain that this intrinsic relationality—the capacity for covenantal relationships—lies at the core of every individual human being and is the basis for holistic human development.

With this theological telos of human development as a foundation, the authors cite relational theories that explore sociocultural influences on one's personal development. For instance, Urie Bronfenbrenner[21] situates normal human

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[20] Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebstyne King, and Kevin S. Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (2nd ed.; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).

[21] Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

development within the varied relational contexts through which people move, noting that optimal growth requires reciprocity and interconnection between and among one's circles of connection. In the same way that optimal individual growth necessitates interaction in relationships, so communities also experience growth and development in mutually beneficial interactions with other communities.[22] Adapting these theories to the online student context highlights that each student we teach is nested in various ecosystems that are also interacting. As students move between various contexts, their adaptation to each new system has the capacity to impact their identity development and encourage reciprocal relationships that reflect the relationality of the Trinity.[23]

Lowe and Lowe extend the ecological model of development to propose a model of spiritual formation that considers the interconnected and interactive nature of this age. These authors highlight that online students' networks of friendships, relationships, and partnerships—when diversified, multifaceted, enriching, and stimulating—creates greater possibilities for growth, resilience, flourishing, and the development of the whole person. The authors considered this phenomenon the "missing link"[24] of spiritual development in theological education—online students are often embedded in ecosystems that go beyond their online classroom, extending into their everyday lives of ministry and leadership. These students are generally connected to other larger systems and social networks, which increases their connectedness and enhances their support, affecting their overall spiritual formation process. As we have worked with students who are embedded in particular

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[22] Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Free Press, 1967).

[23] Balswick, King, and Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self*.

[24] Lowe and Lowe, *Ecologies of Faith*, 98.

contexts and congregations, the particularity and significance of their questions and reflections are compelling because of their connection to the specifics of their embedded realities.

Embedded and embodied formation

As we considered the various ecologies of our students and our focus on reflection, relationships, and practices, the VF office incorporated the framework of "embedded and embodied formation"[25] through the integration of practices to articulate the type of holistic formation that leverages students' ecological development. Dufault-Hunter, a specialist in online formation, notes (in a workshop developed with one of the authors) that we learn (and develop a passion for learning) in a dynamic interaction of course material with our particular web of social, relational, ethnoracial, and ecclesial connections.[26] She views a student's sociocultural embeddedness as a necessary corollary to a theological anthropology that assumes that we are embodied spirits born into a *particular* community, time, and space. The embedded nature of Fuller's formation courses and groups asks

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[25] The overall consensus in cognitive science is that we are not merely "brains" or reasoning animals; "cognition"—knowing and understanding—involves all aspects of the human person—including bodily processes such as perception, emotions, and physical movement. Our understanding depends on our physical interaction with our environment. For a short overview, see Samuel McNerney, "A Brief Guide to Embodied Cognition: Why You Are Not Your Brain," *Scientific American* (November 4, 2011): https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/ guest-blog/a-brief-guide-to-embodied-cognition-why-you-are-not-your-brain/ (accessed 8/22/19). For a book-length exploration of why this model matters for the life of the church, see Warren S. Brown and Brad D. Strawn, *The Physical Nature of Christian Life: Neuroscience, Psychology, & the Church* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[26] Amy Drennan and Erin Dufault-Hunter, "Teaching for Formation: Pedagogy that Fosters Integration of Head, Heart, and Hands," (workshop, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, April 6, 2018).

students to examine their context: social location, theological traditions, families, neighborhoods, workplaces, ecclesiastical communities, political climate, and concrete circumstances of their world. Though some aspects of a student's context may shift over time as students enter into new seasons, this aspect of formation asks students to articulate the values and forces that have already and will continue to shape them as they interact with and are strengthened by other classmates, professors, and mentors who maintain different ecologies and contexts.

The benefit of separating out "embedded" formation is that it requires teachers to recognize that learning not only happens between the autonomous student within the virtual or live classroom; we must also attend to how a student's web of systems and relationships has shaped their understanding and will continue to impact their learning. One example to exemplify this concept occurred in an online IS course; the professor recognized that her online students in China were not developing a clear understanding of the Apostle Paul's charge to overcome cultural difference by discussing race relations within the North American context. Rather, this professor perceived that the students needed to interact with their own embedded context to identify how these same patterns of exclusion or oppression played out in their ethnoracial situation.

Embodied formation, or implementing habits or disciplines of heart (desires, openness to the Spirit), hands (physical, embodied experimentation with the content in context, relationships), and mind (reason and intellect),[27] assumes that our students are formed not only through thinking but also through other aspects of their bodily sensory-motor and affective engagement. By having students embody disciplines in their embedded communities, we engage students not as disembodied beings but as whole people who learn through their doing. In

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[27] Drennan and Dufault-Hunter, "Teaching for Formation."

considering the shaping factors of a student's context, an embedded and embodied formation goes beyond asking students to merely *reflect on* their context, but rather *do something within it with their bodies* in light of course content.

This formational learning that is embedded in a local context takes seriously that the student's identity and calling is being shaped by more than books or coursework. Indeed, when a person enrolls as an online student there is already an intrinsic awareness that traditional "scholarly" work that was classically rooted in the mental model of a life of "leisure" is not their particular path of learning and formation. The online learning space places the emphasis on reflection and understanding that is rooted in a particular place with a particular goal of faithful ministry in and for that place. As John Inge explains, in the scriptures particular places are central to the experience and encounter with God and neighbor. Since God enters the world in a particular place, then the incarnation is not just to the world but to the world through what that particular place helps form in us.[28] A theological education that privileges each student's particular context as more important than a campus with its own almost other-worldly qualities (the great medieval universities were originally founded out of monasteries), encourages a formation that is grounded in the incarnation and requires embodiment in practices that are expressions of and for serving in that place. From a Catholic perspective, Gresham argued that online learning is in line with divine pedagogy, principally because of this incarnational aspect of the process, calling educators to "enflesh their teaching in their own lives and to assist their students to do likewise."[29]

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[28] "Seen in an incarnational perspective, places are the seat of relations or the place of meeting between God and the world." John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Hampshire: Taylor & Francis, 2003).

[29] John Gresham, "The Divine Pedagogy As a Model for Online Education," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 9.1 (2006): 28.

In November 2016, Tod Bolsinger was teaching an Integrated Studies unit on the spiritual practice of lament as a vocation-forming practice. After introducing students to both scriptural passages and readings on lament from theologians of marginalized communities for whom lament is a regular worship practice, students were asked to write their own prayer of lament. Unlike students in traditional classrooms who were put in small groups and picked a topic relevant to the moment that inspired prayers of lament, the online students' assignment was to gather a group of people from their ministry context—either ministry partners or congregants—and write a prayer of lament that was personally applicable to that group of people in their context. One of Bolsinger's students led a Spanish-language ministry in a major American city, and that assignment fell on the week of the national election of a President who had announced his candidacy for president on June 16, 2015 by promising to "immediately terminate" the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program[30] and deport immigrants from Mexico, calling them "rapists" who bring crime and drugs.[31] The student gathered his ministry team together, most of them either immigrants or the children of immigrants and together they read the scriptures of lament and wrote and prayed a prayer of lament.

While many students on campus and in traditional classrooms felt similarly vulnerable that week, the power of a student assignment that in real time was being put to use in a specific community and context cannot be denied. Online

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[30] Katie Reilly, "Here's What President Trump Has Said About DACA in the Past," *Time* (September 5, 2017): https://time.com/4927100/donald-trump-daca-past-statements/(accessed 1/22/20).

[31] Michelle Ye Hee Lee, "Donald Trump's false comments connecting Mexican immigrants and crime," *Washington Post* (July 8, 2015): https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2015/07/08/donald-trumps-false-comments-connecting-mexican-immigrants-and-crime/ (accessed 1/22/20).

formation privileges a students' community and context over the campus. It brings the formational process from the learning community into the ministry community and invites the student to live continually in an action-reflection-new action model of practical theology.[32] The online student, faced with a real-time ministry and cultural challenge, immediately entered into an embodied learning by leading others through a process of reflection, within the relationships of team and community, that led to the practice of lament as a hope-giving and energizing response.

Disruptive learning as formation

As noted above, there is a unique formational capacity that can be leveraged through the various ecologies of a student, attending to the contexts and forms of embodiment that enable students to learn and be shaped in and by their ministry contexts. Additionally, our department discovered that the power of online formation also involves the way that a student's ministry context is disrupted by the diversity of perspectives and voices that are available to an online student.

In a day when more and more of our local communities are becoming homogeneous and "sorted" along political and ideological lines,[33] there is a need for education to bring diversity of thought and perspective that challenges assumptions and mental models. While there is some concern that institutions of higher learning are themselves "sorted" communities of like-

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[32] Branson and Martinez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership*.

[33] "As people seek out the social settings they prefer—as they choose the group that makes them feel the most comfortable—the nation grows more politically segregated—and the benefit that ought to come with having a variety of opinions is lost to the righteousness that is the special entitlement of homogeneous groups." Bill Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded American is Tearing Us Apart* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008), 14.

minded people who skew toward progressive thinking that border on intolerance,[34] the online learning environment has the potential to gather students from such different communities and contexts to make diversity of thought and robust conversation a standard feature of most online forums.

In this way, the dual ecology of the online learning environment creates a safe place for students to engage in consideration of ideas and beliefs that would be unfamiliar and even unwelcome in more homogeneous settings. The online course becomes the source of disruption, challenge, and support all at the same time while encouraging the student to engage viewpoints and beliefs that are foreign to the local context in which they serve and minister.

One example from our own experience was when Tod was teaching a master's level Integrative Studies course on the practices of vocation formation and Amy was serving as the supervisor of the VF Group leaders in the course. One woman shared that her husband was the pastor of a church in their home community and that her studies toward an MDiv was not shared with the congregation. While she and her husband had come to the conviction that she may be called into pastoral ministry, she was not willing to be public about that conviction or her education while her husband was the pastor of a church in a denomination that does not affirm women in pastoral ministry. The couple assumed that they might someday have to consider what it would mean if she wanted to pursue ordination, the online course was the only place in her life that she had to grapple with the theological positions she had held most of her life. Within the context of the diversity of classmates (some who came from

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[34] Catherine Rampell, "Liberal intolerance is on the rise on America's college campuses," *Washington Post* (February 11, 2016): https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/liberal-but-not-tolerant-on-the-nations-college-campuses/2016/02/11/0f79e8e8-d101-11e5-88cd-753e80cd29ad_story.html (accessed 1/22/20).

complementarian backgrounds and others from egalitarian), she could honestly study and seek discernment for her own calling without having to leave her home church or cause a potential conflict for her husband. This couple's entire theology of ordination was disrupted through the learning in the online formation experience, in a way that she (and he!) would never have experienced within their own church community. Furthermore, because their livelihood and the husband's pastoral vocation were certainly going to be upset, the course work created a longer timeline to discern. The presence of her peers and formation group, or the holding environment, provided them the reflective space that was needed.

Key Learnings from our Work in Online Formation

A useful way to frame our opportunities at Fuller, as a model of what other institutions will likely experience also, is to identify the challenges we faced and continue to encounter as we create opportunities for embedded, embodied, and disruptive formation. Below is a table[35] that summarizes some of these opportunities and corresponding challenges that both reflect our findings and could be applied to the reality of other educational institutions:

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[35] Amy Drennan and Erin Dufault-Hunter, "ATS Innovation Grant Summary 2017-2018" (June 2018).

Challenges/Obstacles	Opportunities/Benefits
Resistance to the integration of online embedded and embodied pedagogy as an alternative method of teaching and learning persists; lectures, exams, and research papers remain the preferred mode of teaching.	The explosion of online courses affords leaders and faculty an amazing opportunity for innovation and reformation of theological education. While it has always been true that students learn best when enacting and applying learning in and to their context, offering online courses causes us to encourage students to embody practices more intentionally in their social, cultural, ecclesial, and relational contexts.
Face-to-face presence equates to the best form of holistic formation of students.	Pressing into an embedded and embodied formation highlights the obvious embeddedness of *all* students in their context. This awareness affects formation in face-to-face courses; *all* learners must enact and apply content outside the classroom to experiment with content where and with whom they are embedded as well as with other students in class.

Certain disciplines appear to faculty as especially difficult to engage through anything other than pure academic engagement. Faculty sometimes say, "My course is content-heavy" or "My discipline is academic, not meant to be immediately relevant or directly applicable to a student's life."	While it is true that certain courses or disciplines may seem more suited to embodied and embedded learning, faculty have the opportunity to discover aspects of their own academic disciplines where contexts can be teachers and formation can occur through sensory-motor aspects or affect as "embodiment." Faculty have the opportunity to learn and collaborate together on what makes for optimal learning experiences, highlighting models that draw from the best of current academic research on mind-body connections, educational psychology, and neuroscience.
Fear that an educational institution's rapidly increasing online enrollment will cause a "watering down" of theological education.	The disruptive rise of online education forces leaders in graduate theological education to consider how to engage in good pedagogy, including intentionally utilizing technology to leverage students' own web of relationships and embeddedness in context. This shifts students' focus from engaging in the content of a course *in the classroom* to applying and integrating course content *in their contexts*.

Perception that real-time learning happens best in classroom settings with a singular professor	Real-time learning has the potential to be more impactful when one's classroom learning engages one's context.
Assumption that online education should be a more convenient mode of delivering more educational content to students.	Online education may be *less* convenient for students in that it brings disruption to status quo aspects of their contexts and gives students the ability to recognize blind spots while engaging in their communities of practice and worship.

Conclusion

This chapter reviews the prominent frameworks and strategies that Fuller administrators and faculty members have utilized to offer substantive and effective theological, spiritual, and vocational formation to students in both residential and online settings. The authors assert that online modalities present an opportunity to consider students' integration of learning into their lives, embedded in a specific context, and embodied in intentional Christian practices. This type of learning allows for a disruptive process that uniquely strengthens a student's development of spiritual, personal, and vocational formation.

As this chapter was being edited, the world—especially the educational world—was dramatically disrupted by a large-scale pandemic that forced everyone to shift to fully online learning. What was once resisted, is now required. Formation over distance is now more urgent than ever.

The questions about online education have now shifted to deeper and more heart-felt concerns about spiritual and

vocational formation. The necessity of the moment has led to an outpouring of urgency for deepening relationships, sharing of spiritual practices, empathizing with the challenges of differing contexts, and the gift of technological connection for embedded and embodied formation.

Part III
Psychological Perspectives

Spiritual Formation

Our Spiritual Journey to Clinical Practice

Alexis D. Abernethy

The Spiritual Formation and Integrative Practice Group Course is a ten-week course that seeks to provide an experiential formation group that assists students in deepening their reflection on their spiritual formation and integrative practice. The professor and students share their spiritual autobiography, respond to others' engagement with their story, and then reflect on how their spiritual journey has informed their integration (i.e., incorporation of their Christian faith/theology in psychological practice). This course emerged from my experiences in teaching psychology, my work as a spirituality researcher and group therapist, and my reflections on my own spiritual journey. This chapter will first describe the conceptual rationale for this approach including key professional influences followed by a more personal narrative. The final sections will provide a more detailed description of the course followed by key insights for promoting spiritual formation.

Insights from Teaching, Research, and Conceptual Models

Approximately ten years after teaching School of Psychology integration courses (e.g., Spiritual Transcendence and Health, Arts, Spirituality, and Transformation, and a Clinical Consultation Course) designed to help students understand the role of faith in the practice of psychology and psychological research, I began to notice student's reluctance to practice explicit integration (e.g., the use of scripture, prayer, etc.) in

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psychotherapeutic contexts where the use of a spiritual resource was clinically indicated and requested by the patient.[1] I found this particularly unexpected in light of the School of Psychology's emphasis on integration and the current ethical and multicultural guidelines of the American Psychological Association that explicitly outline the importance of incorporating a patient's cultural context, including their religious worldview, in the therapeutic process as clinically indicated.[2] Although students were often encouraged to engage in explicit integration and were learning some specialized techniques, they were also experiencing some reticence in integrating spiritual interventions in their work out of expressed ethical concerns or mixed feedback from some professors and supervisors. Students expressed that even when they understood that an explicit spiritual intervention might be indicated, they felt ill equipped to implement this intervention. Students identified two major challenges: their ambivalence as well as the specific skill set. This experience of ambivalence was not new given that Fuller's psychology program was the first APA accredited Christian psychology program.[3] In earlier days, most clinical settings would not have supported integrative interventions, but this ambivalence was unexpected given current changes in the field that embraced a more spiritual perspective.

In response to this dilemma and students' request, I

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[1] Siang-Yang Tan, "Religion in Clinical Practice: Implicit and Explicit Integration," *Religion and the Clinical Practice of Psychology* (ed. Edward P. Shafranske; Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1996), 365–87.

[2] American Psychological Association, *Multicultural Guidelines: An Ecological Approach to Context, Identity, and Intersectionality* (August 2017): http://www.apa.org/about/policy/multicultural-guidelines. pdf (accessed 10/10/19).

[3] H. Newton Malony and Hendrika Vande Kemp, *Psychology and the Cross: The Early History of Fuller Seminary's School of Psychology* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Seminary Press, 1995).

developed the course, Spiritual Interventions in Therapy, to provide support and instruction for students to develop explicit spiritual interventions. The course objectives were as follows:

1. to articulate issues of intrapersonal integration and the spirituality of the therapist and client,
2. to reflect theologically on the role of the Holy Spirit and worship in therapy, and
3. to develop an approach to spiritual assessment and spiritual interventions in therapy.[4]

I used Kenneth Pargament and Elizabeth Krumrei's Tool, Open-Ended Questions to Elicit the Client's Story[5] that was adapted from David Hodge[6] and James Griffith and Melissa Griffith[7] as an approach for thinking about a patients' spiritual journey. They designed these questions for patients with an emphasis on "the role that spirituality plays in their problems, their resources, their critical life events, and their larger context."[8] Given that this was developed for the clinical assessment of patients experiencing psychological difficulties, the problem focus would be expected. An important contribution to their approach is that the spiritual journey is viewed as a dynamic process that includes times of positive connection, but also disconnection. This tool addresses three aspects of a patient's

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[4] Alexis D. Abernethy, "Spiritual Interventions in Therapy," (syllabus, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 2015).

[5] Kenneth I. Pargament and Elizabeth J. Krumrei, "Clinical Assessment of Clients' Spirituality" *Spirituality and the Therapeutic Process: A Comprehensive Resource from Intake to Termination* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2009), 103.

[6] David R. Hodge, "Spiritual Assessment: A Review of Major Qualitative Methods and a New Framework for Assessing Spirituality," *Social Work* 46.3 (July 2001): 203–14.

[7] James L. Griffith and Melissa Elliott Griffith, *Encountering the Sacred in Psychotherapy: How to Talk with People about Their Spiritual Lives* (New York: Guilford, 2002).

[8] Pargament and Krumrei, "Clinical Assessment," 93.

spiritual life: past, present, and future. Pargament and Krumrei highlight the importance of the initial search that may be fueled by familial and other influences as well as encounters with God, followed by traditional and nontraditional paths of "knowing (e.g., Bible study, scientific study), the pathway of acting (e.g., rituals, virtuous deeds), the pathway of relating (e.g., building religious communities, acts of loving kindness), and the pathway of experiencing (e.g., prayer, meditation, music)."[9]

They add that the experience of one's spirituality may be threatened due to struggles within or between religious communities or divine struggles and these challenges may result in disengagement from the divine. Steven Sandage and LeRon Shults's Spiritual Transformation Model[10] highlights the ebb and flow of the spiritual life; they describe the range of positive and negative experiences that may be associated with a period of *dwelling* that includes comfort and safety as well as potential boredom and disappointment in addition to a period of *seeking* that includes anxiety and trust. These perspectives provide support and permission for individuals to embrace challenges and turmoil as common features of one's spiritual life.

In preparing students to examine their patient's spiritual lives, one of their assignments is to interview and be interviewed by a fellow classmate. This process was illuminating as students appreciated reflecting on their spiritual journey and noted that in a past class they had had an opportunity to write their spiritual autobiography where they explored their theological tradition and its relationship to important theological concepts such as atonement and theodicy. Sharing aspects of their spiritual journey with others in narrative form as well as asking questions of one

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[9] Pargament and Krumrei, "Clinical Assessment," 94.
[10] Steven J. Sandage and F. LeRon Shults, "Relational Spirituality and Transformation: A Relational Integration Model," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 26.3 (2007): 261–69.

another out loud was a new experience for them. For some it was awkward and uncomfortable primarily due to limited opportunities for sharing these dimensions of their spiritual journey. This reflection was consistent with what we have found in our research on corporate worship. In our psychophysiological study, the Scientific Study of Worship funded by the Templeton Foundation,[11] that examined contrasting worship experiences including experiences of feeling close to God, struggling with God, and being spiritually transformed, we found that having over one hour to reflect on their spiritual experience was a novel experience for an ethnically diverse sample of members from Pentecostal and Presbyterian churches. If church members have limited opportunity to reflect on their spiritual experience and our students have less practice inquiring about the spiritual journey of their patients, sometimes this inquiry is avoided not only because students may be unsure of the questions to ask, but also because they are less familiar with their own journeys and less practiced in asking and attending to the responses of others.

The challenge was not only related to limited experience, but also discomfort in sharing more negatively valenced experiences that included pain and struggle. In our worship study as participants described transformational worship experiences, 73% of these experiences involved the process of forgiveness.[12] Consistent with a Christian understanding of forgiveness, participants were asked, "Did a time of confession and sense of assurance of God's forgiveness play a role in their

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[11] Alexis D. Abernethy, ed., *Worship That Changes Lives: Multidisciplinary and Congregational Perspectives on Spiritual Transformation* (Engaging Worship; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

[12] Alexis D. Abernethy et al., "Varieties of Spiritual Experience: A Study of Closeness to God, Struggle, Transformation, and Confession-Forgiveness in Communal Worship," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 35.1 (2016): 9–21.

transformational experience?" In an effort to understand the emotional valences of these responses, my colleagues and I used a computer program developed by James Pennebaker and Martha Francis,[13] Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC), that draws on over 2,000 words to categorize the textual responses in emotional categories that have been associated with health. We also used Michael McCullough and colleagues' categories of cost and benefits:[14]

> The cost-related category included key words and word stems such as betray*, hurt, offens*, suffer*, violat*, and unfair. The words stems with *'s allow the dictionary to count all words that begin with the letters preceding the asterisk... The benefit-related category included key words and word stems such as benefit*, bless*, good, regained, and stronger. We also used Witvliet and colleagues'[15] categories of forgiveness and gratitude.[16]

We found that in participants' descriptions of transformational experiences involving forgiveness, forgiveness language was associated with more cost, benefit, and positive emotion language. So there was pain, offense, and/or hurt associated with the transformational experience of forgiveness. Participants also noted feelings of guilt and a sense of being

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[13] James W. Pennebaker and Martha E. Francis, "Cognitive, Emotional, and Language Processes in Disclosure," *Cognition and Emotion* 10.6 (November 1996): 601–26.

[14] Michael E. McCullough, Lindsey M. Root, and Adam D. Cohen, "Writing about the Benefits of an Interpersonal Transgression Facilitates Forgiveness," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 74.5 (October 2006): 887–97.

[15] Charlotte Witvliet et al., "Compassion-Focused Reappraisal, Benefit-Focused Reappraisal, and Rumination after an Interpersonal Offense: Emotion-Regulation Implications for Subjective Emotion, Linguistic Responses, and Physiology," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 5.3 (May 2010): 226–42.

[16] Abernethy et al., "Varieties of Spiritual Experience," 14.

renewed: "Descriptions of confession-forgiveness were associated with more gratitude than positive emotion. . . . While positive emotion was expressed, the more profound experience in response to divine forgiveness was gratitude that arose from a sense of being more fully reconciled to God with a sense of restoration."[17]

Negative emotions were present in the descriptions of forgiveness experiences, but positive experiences often undid the effects of the negative experiences. Participant descriptions of these experiences support Barbara Fredrickson and Robert Levenson's[18] undoing hypothesis that positive emotions may undo the effects of negative emotions.

What are the implications of these conceptual models and spirituality research for understanding spiritual transformation and the process of spiritual formation? Spaces that provide room for a multivalenced emotional expression and experiences of hurt and offense may be important for not only obtaining a fuller picture of an individual's spiritual journey, but also capturing those critical moments that deepen or challenge one's faith. In our work,[19] experiences of spiritual struggle were associated with more negative emotion and cost words and fewer benefit and gratitude words. Although Julie Exline and her colleagues' work[20] on spiritual struggles emphasizes the maladaptive dimensions of spiritual struggle such as divine, moral, demonic, and moral struggles, they also acknowledge the critical role that these struggles may play in spiritual growth. I would argue based on

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[17] Abernethy et al., "Varieties of Spiritual Experience," 17–18.

[18] Barbara L. Fredrickson and Robert W. Levenson, "Positive Emotions Speed Recovery from the Cardiovascular Sequelae of Negative Emotions," *Cognition and Emotion* 12.2 (March 1998): 191–220.

[19] Abernethy et al., "Varieties of Spiritual Experience."

[20] Nick Stauner, Julie Exline, and Kenneth I. Pargament, "Religious and Spiritual Struggles as Concerns for Health and Well-Being," *HORIZONTE* 14 (2016): 48.

twenty-five years of spirituality research and teaching integration in secular and seminary settings that a major gap in training in spiritual formation is providing sufficient space for spiritual struggle and more specifically divine struggle, times when we have felt distant or even abandoned by God. This experience is important in and of itself, but combined with the resultant growth, understanding, or continued angst, it is powerfully formational for our students as it gives them permission to be authentic about where they are in their journey and it deepens their capacity to be an embodied presence and empathic container in their work at therapists.

Professors from all disciplines have the opportunity to normalize spiritual struggle by sharing some of their unanswered questions as well as their past and current struggles with God. Students frequently share that following modeling where I have shared my own spiritual struggles, they finally feel they have permission to share their own anger and frustration at God as well as their doubts. The professor's willingness to be vulnerable and take a risk invites their own sharing. They have feared that this dimension of their lives would not be welcome or understood at a seminary or in their church community.

Insights from group therapy training

Group therapy training places a high value on experiential learning in group therapy treatment and demonstration groups in group psychotherapy training.[21] The American Group Psychotherapy Association utilizes an institute format for training group therapists, where participants have the opportunity to gain cognitive, emotional, and relational insights from their experiences and interactions with fellow mental health attendees using a small group format. Insights gained from the "here and

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[21] Yrvin D. Yalom and Molyn Leszcz, *The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy* (*5th ed.*; New York: Basic Books, 2005).

now" of this group process deepen participants understanding of group work and themselves;[22] this process is widely recognized as critical to group training.[23] David Altfeld and Harold Bernard[24] have developed an experiential supervision model that maximizes the power of the group and invites participants to provide feedback to fellow students using their own immediate reactions and feelings to the presented content on an experiencing ego level (i.e., a sense of experiencing from a place of common ground, we-ness, collaborative learning together) rather than a more superego level that would be evaluative, directive, and convey a more didactic instructional and potentially punitive tone. The rationale is that what is occurring in the work with the therapist and patient will arise in unconscious ways in the room as the student presents and the others attend and respond. Insight will be able to be gained as relevant issues will emerge that can be held and explored by others and this will increase the therapist's ability to more fully see and accept what is happening in the therapeutic process. In certain ways, the group provides an empathic mirror for the therapists in training. I have used this model quite effectively in training therapists and the powerful insights that emerge are invaluable. Altfeld and Bernard note that this approach can be modified depending on the context. For this course, the students and professor are encouraged to adopt more of an experiencing ego stance as stories are shared rather than an evaluative posture. The notion is that what emerges in this process will be helpful in our learning together and inform our

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[22] For an example of such group training, see https://www. agpa.org/home/continuing-ed-meetings-events-training/agpa-connect-2020.

[23] John Kiweewa et al., "Endorsement of Growth Factors in Experiential Training Groups," *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work* 38.1 (March 2013): 68–93.

[24] David A. Altfeld, and Harold S. Bernard, "Experiential Group Psychotherapy Supervision," *Group* 23.1 (March 1999): 1–17.

therapeutic work. The focus is on conscious rather than unconscious levels. Although this model is not spiritually focused, I have found that particularly when I use this approach in Christian contexts, this provides a more flexible space for the work of the Holy Spirit. I not only encourage participants to share their general associations, but what they might be hearing the Holy Spirit saying. I am sensing and intuiting not only the psychological, but the spiritual pulse in the room.

Insights from group spiritual direction

Given this spiritual formation group, in addition to this experiencing ego stance, I have also encouraged students to adopt a more spiritual posture of group spiritual direction.[25] Key instructions for group spiritual direction include listening with a prayerful heart without interrupting the person who shares. Following this sharing, members are silent in an attempt to hear from God, to cut through personality and other biases that might interfere with hearing God's voice. We seek to be sensitive to the movement of the Holy Spirit. Members then share their questions or comments and strive to avoid pursuing a personal agenda for the person. Prayers are offered to the person who presented. This same format is repeated for everyone over a 1.5 to two-hour time period followed by a time of reflection where there is an effort to hear and notice God together and see what emerged. The focus is not on analyzing or prescription, but a gentle, open attentive process. For this formation group course, the format of a presenter sharing while others engage in a prayerful, attentive listening posture without interruption is followed by a prayer offered by the professor. In addition to these conceptual insights my spiritual journey has influenced the development of this course.

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[25] For an introduction to spiritual direction, see https://shalem. org/1995/01/01/group-spiritual-direction-what-is-it/.

Spiritual Autobiography

My family of origin

I grew up in a United Methodist family of several generations of United Methodism on my mother's side and three generations of United Methodist pastors on my father's side. My maternal grandmother, a retired teacher and school principal, who had her own home in South Carolina, lived with our family for nine months out of the year to provide support for our family. I attended a Black United Methodist church that was connected to a predominantly White conference and where my father served as a pastor.

My grandmother's spirituality had the greatest influence on me as I was closest to her. Her spiritual practices in terms of reading her daily devotional material were also more apparent than my parents and she articulated her calling explicitly. She saw her role as helping provide home-cooked meals for this pastor's family regularly, but especially on Sunday, so that following church we would come home to a hot meal. As a young child, I viewed this as my grandmother's "get out of going to church card" and was quite envious, but I later understood that when she missed church, it was a loss for her; she was thinking of how she could best serve the family as a whole. Her humble, loving, and warm presence combined with a commitment to discipline provided me with the most tangible example of the heart of God. As we got older, she would frequently attend the first of two services that my father led at two different churches. I would understand a bit more about her description of her calling to live with us even as she thoroughly enjoyed her home, friends, and family in South Carolina. I marveled at the sacrifice that my grandmother was making. I imagined that something about her spirituality and her life in God allowed her not only to make this sacrifice, but also to do it with a heart of loving joy.

This appreciation was heightened by the trials of my grandmother's life. My grandmother was one of thirteen children

and although her family valued education and she obtained her college degree, the family worked on someone else's farm growing up. They were poor. She married my grandfather who was a pharmacist and married into an upper-class family of a physician and pharmacist brothers. My grandmother worked as a schoolteacher and principal during the year, but unfortunately due to familial conflict and my grandfather's chronic illnesses and hospitalizations as well as the depression, my grandmother had to take my mother with her to work as a maid in white folks' home in the Northeast US during the summer to meet their financial needs. I regularly heard stories related to the pain and disappointment associated with all of this and yet experienced her sense of having transcended this: she was not defined but informed by these experiences. She would share how her faith provided her with strength during these seasons. I always sensed the deep and abiding faith of my grandmother and some of my motivation for studying spirituality and health arises from my fascination with the faith of my grandmother including her perseverance despite her impoverished early circumstances, her ability to forgive her in-laws and not walk in bitterness, and her decision to serve our family by making fabulous Southern meals and rearing her grandchildren in collaboration with my parents. This was an example of Christian spirituality lived out in relationship and service that modeled grace and forgiveness.

Responding to the call

Although I attended church regularly, I did not accept Christ until my second year of college while attending Howard University. I was active in the church, but had not made a personal decision to accept Christ. As a "good preacher's kid" I was a member of a Christian Fellowship, Igbimo Otito Christian Fellowship that was sponsored by Tom Skinner Associates, a campus-based ministry led by Black Evangelicals designed to provide leadership training and address racial reconciliation.

After hearing Tom Skinner's testimony on tape, I accepted Christ on a Sunday afternoon. I remember a pivotal visit by Tom and Barbara Skinner to one of our fellowship meetings where they shared the importance of forming an army for Christ. I was so zealous that I thought the way that I might best serve God was to become a pastor. They noted that that was an option, but in this fellowship of Black Christians from Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States, we were encouraged to pursue our calling to be a redemptive influence in the world and to conform to the image of Christ through our professional aspirations as engineers, physicians, psychologists, and preachers. From that day on I have embraced my call as including not only what I believe, what I practice, or whom I evangelize, but how I live out my everyday life in my profession, my relationships, and my community. My faith was not simply individual: the legacy of my grandmother and parent's journey as well as the mantra that I internalized from Howard University was that my career pursuits were to serve the Black community, specifically, and the greater good. This commitment was to be lived out while recognizing the ugly legacy of racism centuries before Christ where systematic efforts to obscure the contributions of people of African descent were outlined in *The Destruction of Black Civilization*.[26] My recent visit to Egypt provided a powerful witness to the engineering, scientific, environmentally respectful, and spiritually grounded legacy of my Black Egyptian ancestors and increased my sense of lament at how this rich legacy is often distorted. My experience of racism in denominational and other institutional structures and policies has been sobering and discouraging and yet as I remember my grandmother's lament and stories of resilience through the power of the Holy Spirit I find strength to challenge injustice and not

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[26] Chancellor Williams, *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.* (Revised ed.; Chicago: Third World, 1987).

walk in bitterness. I have encountered the most explicit manifestations of evil and racism in the context of the church, but I have also experienced the most transformational, inspiring moments in my church community.

The power of music

Given the vocal training of my grandmother and parents as well as my parents' profession as music teachers along with my participation in church and college choirs and my study of classical piano for sixteen years through college, music has been "home" for me. In addition to my love of music, I find deep satisfaction in emotionally expressing myself in joyful ways as well as lament through music. The hymns of the United Methodist church and Negro Spirituals have been deeply formational for me. In teaching at a seminary with a Center for Worship, Theology, and Arts where I have obtained rich theological, cultural, and psychological resources for researching worship in combination with my membership in a vibrant non-denominational church under the leadership of Bishop Kenneth Ulmer and a choir under the direction of Dr. Diane White-Clayton, I have integrated my psychologist and artistic identities in efforts to understand the psychology of worship,[27] the musicianship of worship leaders,[28] and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.[29] These formational experiences have informed my inclusion of an artistic expression in the spiritual formation course.

Understanding integration

Newt Malony was retiring as the Chair of Integration

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[27] Abernethy, *Worship That Changes Lives*.

[28] Alexis D. Abernethy et al., "Corporate Worship and Spiritual Formation: Insights from Worship Leaders," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 34.3 (2015): 266–79.

[29] Abernethy et al., "Varieties of Spiritual Experience."

when I arrived at Fuller. Given our common United Methodist background, I felt a connection to him even as I made a decision to pursue a different denominational affiliation. I have always found his tripartite model of integration helpful. He described integration in terms of key principles, the profession, and the person. His focus on the person of the psychologist and intrapersonal integration was an important contribution to what I had experienced as a more intervention-focused integration. Randy Sorenson's[30] emphasis on the role of modeling in integration was also deeply influential:

> When it comes to shaping how students work with their clients' religious material clinically, all the books, classes, seminars, and workshops in the world—including professional articles such as this one—may pale in comparison to the clinical impact of how religious issues were handled in their own personal therapies. It may be more caught than taught.[31]

I would add how religious issues and relationships were responded to not only by therapists, but also by their professors and mentors.

Rationale for the course

These experiences were pivotal in the design for this spiritual formation course. I was committed to designing a course that was informed by key factors that had been integral to my own formation. I wanted to engage with my students in a relational and embodied way in which we journeyed together in an experiential small group where we not only heard their stories, but that I also shared my own. I wanted to model the personal

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[30] Randall Lehmann Sorenson, "Therapists' (and Their Therapists') God Representations in Clinical Practice," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 22.4 (1994): 325–44.

[31] Sorenson, "Therapists'," 342.

formative process that Malony describes. I also wanted to model a certain "stretching and movement toward transformation" that not only shared key elements of my historical journey, but also held pivotal ways that God was working in my life in the present. In addition to sharing times of connection, sharing times of disconnection from God and our religious communities was also a vital component. It was important that we had space to share our stories that included key elements of our familial and cultural backgrounds. Everyone was invited to share an artistic element, for example a song, visual art, or live performance, as part of their sharing. Following this sharing, we had an opportunity to respond to what was shared at an experiencing ego level mindful of what God might be saying. I would either end this half of the class with prayer or at the end of the second hour. The second half of class was focused on how their spiritual journey had influenced their practice and current practice implications.

Overview of the Spiritual Formation and Integrative Practice Group (SFIPG) Course

As noted earlier the aim of this course is to provide an experiential formation group that will offer a small group learning experience for students to deepen their reflection on their spiritual formation and integrative practice. Course objectives for students include the following: deepen their ability to articulate perspectives on the presence of God personally, strengthen their skills in conceptualizing their integrative practice, articulate their integrative orientation, and identify factors that will contribute to their continuing commitment to integrative work.

The course has a limit of eight students. The first week provides an orientation and rationale for the course highlighting some of the major insights from the first section of the paper and preparing the students for an experiential format. The subsequent nine weeks are devoted to individual sharing followed by group responding. The final session has a local retreat format and occurs

in a different room that includes live artistic worship that may include, visual art, music, or spoken word. Communal experiences during this "retreat" may include lectio divina, communion, or spiritual songs. Reflections on key insights from the required texts, one's calling, and a termination process for the group are also a focus in this final session.

During the first hour, the professor and students share their response to the following prompts:

> Please share with us a time that you experienced God (e.g., met God, heard from God, felt God, had a sense of God's presence, etc.) in a meaningful way personally, in relating to others, and in community. Share a time when you felt that God was absent or distant?[32]

The presenter may speak for about forty minutes followed by fifteen minutes of responding. Consistent with Sandage and Shults' model,[33] the inclusion of both an experience of connection and disconnection are critical dimensions. As emphasized by Makungu Akinyela,[34] the verbal articulation of individual, relational, and communal experiences of one's faith are also important.

During the second hour the professor and students share their response to the questions below:

> How do your experiences of God over the course of your life inform your clinical practice? How might you want your life in God to inform your practice in the future? How has your clinical experience(s) impacted your understanding and experience of God? At this point in

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[32] Alexis D. Abernethy, "Spiritual Formation and Integrative Group Practice," (syllabus, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 2019).

[33] Sandage and Shults, "Relational Spirituality."

[34] Makungu M. Akinyela, "Testimony of Hope: African Centered Praxis for Therapeutic Ends," *Journal of Systemic Therapies* 24.1 (2005): 5–18.

your Christian journey, how do you envision your call to God's mission in the world?[35]

Response to these questions are typically about twenty minutes and involve more interaction and discussion among the members of the small group. Often what is shared in the first segment may be highlighted by other students or the professor.

The three required texts are Jamie Aten and Mark Leach's *Spirituality and the Therapeutic Process: A Comprehensive Resource from Intake to Termination.*[36] Parker Palmer's *Let your Life Speak* [37] and Richard Peace's *Noticing God.*[38] Students are assigned weekly readings from these books and expected to incorporate key concepts of their spiritual journey and reflections into their integrative practice. Palmer and Peace's texts were chosen as they are helpful tools to facilitate students' attentiveness to God's voice in their lives. For some depending on their tradition, denomination, culture, and family socialization this is a familiar concept for others this is less familiar. Some of our reflections include the degree of confusion and the misperceptions associated with this notion of hearing from God. The Aten and Leach book helps students to consider practical ways that they can incorporate a spiritual perspective in their work.

My goal for each session is to facilitate the students' sharing their journey. It seems that the modeling by the professor and the Holy Spirit provide fertile ground for this, so the preparation and format of the course affords ample space for students to share in the diverse ways that they desire. This can

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[35] Abernethy, "Integrative Group Practice."

[36] Jamie D. Aten and Mark M. Leach, *Spirituality and the Therapeutic Process: A Comprehensive Resource from Intake to Termination* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2009).

[37] Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

[38] Richard Peace, *Noticing God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012).

range from profoundly painful personal, familial, and church experiences to amazingly intimate encounters with God and others. The greatest challenge for me has been to sit with unresolved feelings that students may have in their relationship with God and related to their faith. I have had to respect the journey and the process. This patience has often been rewarded by clinical examples when a student understands that sitting with and demonstrating empathy in the midst of their patient's spiritual struggle and ambiguity may be an important therapeutic posture.

Students' reflections on what this course has meant to them includes a deep appreciation for verbal rather than written sharing. Some have had the opportunity to read portions of their spiritual autobiography, others are friends, but they find that the oral presentation of their journey and the response of others adds a novel, embodied, relational component that is often transformational and enlightening. Here is one student's feedback on the course:

> I wanted to let you know how special the group was and how impactful it was for me. To hear the group members' stories, yours included, was a powerful experience. I appreciated the space to tell my own story and reflect on my own spiritual journey. Your openness to a variety of experiences and your honoring of them came across as excellent modeling of a therapeutic stance. You truly provided a space for people to tell their own story without judgment. I think you chose excellent readings for the course and I enjoyed the semi-structured format overall. Thank you for investing yourself into this course and making it so wonderful.

Perhaps one way of understanding this experiential approach to teaching spiritual formation is that integration is caught rather

than taught.[39]

One way that integration is caught is through stories; this is evident in the use of parables in the Bible as well as narrative theology. This course draws on the power of story as a tool for reflection and deepened insight. Narrative therapy is a psychotherapeutic approach that values the role of the patient's story. The emphasis here moves away from the traditional individualistic focus on the problem to an elaboration of the person's story.[40] Stephen Madigan notes that the therapist allows the patients to situate themselves in the fabric of their lives as members of communities as well as individuals.

> Whatever voice the field of psychology warrants, narrative therapy will continue to push the field toward a consideration of poststructuralism, anti-individualism, and social justice—in all its forms.[41]

Despite the aspiration conveyed in this quote, narrative therapy, similar to other therapeutic approaches, has been critiqued for its Eurocentric western focus.[42] Although he does not consider himself a narrative therapist, Akinyela sees similarities between narrative approaches and his approach to testimony therapy, an approach that draws on indigenous healing practices and is grounded in the culture, history, and experience of African Americans.[43] Key emphases include "metaphors grounded in musicality, in cultural proverbs, and attending to the rhythm and

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[39] Sorenson, "Therapists."

[40] Stephen Madigan, "Recent Developments and Future Directions in Narrative Therapy," *Narrative Therapy* (2nd ed.; Theories of Psychotherapy; Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2019), 117–60.

[41] Madigan, "Recent Developments," 159.

[42] Makungu M. Akinyela, "Narrative Therapy and Cultural Democracy: A Testimony View," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy* 35.1 (March 2014): 46–49; cf. Madigan, "Recent Developments."

[43] Akinyela, "Testimony of Hope."

beat of the conversation and the use of the body in language."[44] This course format draws on some of these principles. It emphasizes verbal sharing of the joy and pain of our spiritual journeys in a communal context. Music as well as other art forms are encouraged as an expression of one's faith journey. As members attend to one another, they are not only listening to the content and seeking to discern spiritually, but also tuning in to the rhythm, beat, and emotions of the presenter's life as conveyed through his/her voice and body. This relational, embodied sharing builds on the strengths of the oral tradition of indigenous peoples, helps orient the presenter in his/her story and context, deepens our relational understanding of one another, and through the power of the Holy Spirit edifies.

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[44] Madigan, "Recent Developments," 126–7.

Vocation as Becoming

Calling, Thriving, and *Telos*

Pamela Ebstyne King

My friends in real estate always tell me that what matters most in selling property is "location, location, location." Working with graduate students over the years, I have found that what is often stirring at deep levels in their minds, what can provide a great sense of inspiration, and what similarly can cause a great amount of stress is—vocation, vocation, vocation!

As an "Integrator"—one who has lived and worked at the intersection of several disciplines—this chapter presents my thoughts gleaned on vocational discernment and formation from theological, biblical, and psychological perspectives. As a woman ordained to a Ministry of Equipping by the Presbyterian Church (USA) and to a faculty position in the School of Psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary, I am one who has personally and intellectually wrestled with the idea of vocation and calling. From a personal perspective, discerning and forging my sense of vocation as a professor, minister, wife, and mom of three has been a journey. Intellectually, it is one that I consider from my background in human development, dynamic systems theory, positive psychology, and theology. The focus of my scholarship has been on understanding human thriving, the role of faith in thriving, and how thriving and faith relate to joy. Consequently, my aim is to offer my best understanding of vocation as it relates to thriving and a joy-filled life in Christ.

When I was a first-year Masters of Divinity student at Fuller, a friend and fellow student, Craig Detweiller, in his typical

provocative and vivifying manner, asked me what really pushed my buttons. Impromptu, I responded with conviction, "Enabling people to be who God created them to be!" There it was: in my mid-twenties, I spontaneously named my vocational purpose. However, understanding how to practically pursue this as both a call and an actual paying job has been an ongoing process of learning, teaching, researching, writing, balancing, praying, preaching, relating, parenting, and living. In retrospect, my last 25–30 years have been a journey of simultaneously living and discerning my vocation, which I would describe as *understanding* human thriving and *activating* those around me—whether my family, students, colleagues, friends—to thrive. As a spoiler alert, I believe vocation is the fullest expression of thriving and the means by which people experience the most profound joy. In this chapter, I view vocation through the lens of thriving.

Thriving as Transformation Towards *Telos*

Words like thriving and flourishing are increasingly common in both the broader culture and academic disciplines like theology and psychology. In this chapter, I refer to *thriving as the process of growing towards one's purpose.*[1] Common dictionaries define thriving as growing vigorously or flourishing. This notion of vitality and growth is invigorating but does not inform the nature or direction of growth. When thinking about human thriving, an important question to consider is whether all growth is both good and biblical. For instance, would growing in my capacity to lie and cheat be aligned with God's intentions for humankind? Obviously, not.

How then, do we understand towards what end we should grow? Fortunately, our Christian faith offers tools for

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[1] Pamela E. King, "What's God Got to do with It?: Nurturing Spirituality and the Ability to Thrive," *Story, Formation and Culture* (eds. Benjamin D. Espinoza, James Riley Estep, and Shirley Morganthaler; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018), 296–304.

answering such questions about directionality and ideals. After all, Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and live it to the fullest" (John 10:10). Marianne Meye Thompson has written that abundant life is lived at the intersection of the goodness and fullness of life now in the earthly ecology of God's creation and the surpassing fullness of eternal life that is in excess of our earthly imaginations.[2] Thriving is such abundant life. Dare, I say, "It is *fuller* living." From this perspective, thriving is an eschatological term—one that includes the potential goodness in our present life, but acknowledges that an even fuller or complete experience of thriving awaits the other side of this life. It has a proleptic quality in that it is incomplete and maintains an orientation of anticipation toward what is to come.[3]

Given that thriving involves the present but also a sense of eventual completion, teleology is useful for defining thriving. *Telos* is the Greek word for "purpose," "goal," or "completion." In both its theological and psychological meaning, *teleology* refers to the study or understanding of the purpose of being human.[4] As a psychologist, when teaching or thinking about human

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[2] Marianne Meye Thompson, "Alpha and Omega—and Everything in Between: Jesus Christ and Human Flourishing," *Envisioning the Good Life: Essays on God, Christ, and Human Flourishing in Honor of Miroslav Volf* (eds. Matthew Croasmun, Zoran Grozdanov, and Ryan McAnnally-Linz; Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 16–28.

[3] For further description of the proleptic and ecstatic nature of the flourishing life, see Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology that Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2019), 172.

[4] Generally speaking, teleology is the understanding of purpose and ultimate ends. Within theology, teleology refers to the doctrine of design and purpose in the material world. Within philosophy, it refers to the understanding a phenomenon in terms of its intended purpose. Within psychology, teleology refers to the completed or highest goal of intended development; see Pamela E. King, "Joy Distinguished: Teleological Perspectives of Joy as a Virtue," *Journal of Positive Psychology* 15.1 (2020): 33–39.

development, I draw on this notion of *telos* to inform a biblical and/or theological perspective of God's goal or intention for humankind. This allows us to consider what should ideally develop as humans mature. Thus, from a Christian perspective, the answer to the question, "What is thriving?" involves understanding the purposes for which God created humans. I lean heavily on the doctrine of the image of God to understand unique aspects of human creation (Gen 1:26).[5] Christological and trinitarian perspectives on the image of God inform a threefold framework of human *telos*.

Conformity to Christ

The New Testament proclaims that Jesus Christ is the perfect image of God (Col 1:15). Consequently, Christians recognize this and understand that humans are made in the triune image of God. We acknowledge that God's goal or purpose for humankind is to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). Therefore, *telos* or the goal of being human involves becoming like Christ, having the mind of Christ, and aligning one's life to the way of Christ (see Figure 1).

Particularity

Second, this call to *conformity* does not mean *uniformity*. The Bible never suggests that we are to *become* Christ, but rather *like* Christ. *Telos* involves fully becoming the unique person that God created each of us to be. Psalm 139 reminds us that each

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[5] See Pamela E. King, "The Reciprocating Self: Trinitarian and Christological Anthropologies of Being and Becoming," *Journal of Christianity and Psychology* 35.3 (Fall 2016): 15–32; Jack O. Balswick, Pamela E. King, and Kevin S. Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (2nd ed.; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016); and Pamela E. King and William Whitney, "What's the 'Positive' in Positive Psychology: Teleological Considerations Based on Creation and Imago Doctrines," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 43.1 (Spring 2015): 47–59.

person is fearfully and wonderfully made by God (vv. 9–10). Although a common notion of our *telos* is to be more closely conformed to the image of Christ, we each do so uniquely with our own particular gifts, propensities, and interests. The Bible proclaims that each person has a unique constellation of spiritual gifts to be used for the welfare of the church (1 Cor 12). In my human development class, my students give a huge sigh of relief when I remind them that they are created to be and become themselves. What freedom and liberation we experience in this! We are called to be ourselves, not another. In a culture where competition and comparison run rampant, I was delighted when I found a birthday card at a local bookstore quoting Oscar Wilde, "Be yourself. Everyone else is already taken!" As we mature and thrive by "attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13), we do so not in a generic manner, but we in a deeply personal and unique way.

Relationality

The teleological insistence to become oneself is not an anointing of narcistic navel gazing. Please note: as much as telos requires human uniqueness, it insists on relatedness. One of my early seminary professors, the late Ray Anderson, used to say, "God is a being in communion." We, too, are created to be in relationship with God, humankind, and the rest of creation. All believers are called by God to be a part of community, placed in the body of Christ by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). Thus, I champion the notion of a telos of the Reciprocating Self.[6] Individuation and differentiation occur on the way towards becoming reciprocating selves who live in intimacy with others, without losing their sense of self. We are not just created to be individual selves, but selves in relationship. Reciprocity conveys the notion of give and take.

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[6] Balswick, King, and Reimer, *Reciprocating Self* and King, "Reciprocating Self," 15–32.

God created us for just that.

Figure 1 suggests the threefold *telos* of the Reciprocating Self. The overlapping ovals convey that thriving involves God's intention for us to become (1) conformed to Christ, (2) as our

Uniqueness

***Telos* - Thriving**

Conformed to Christ

Relatedness
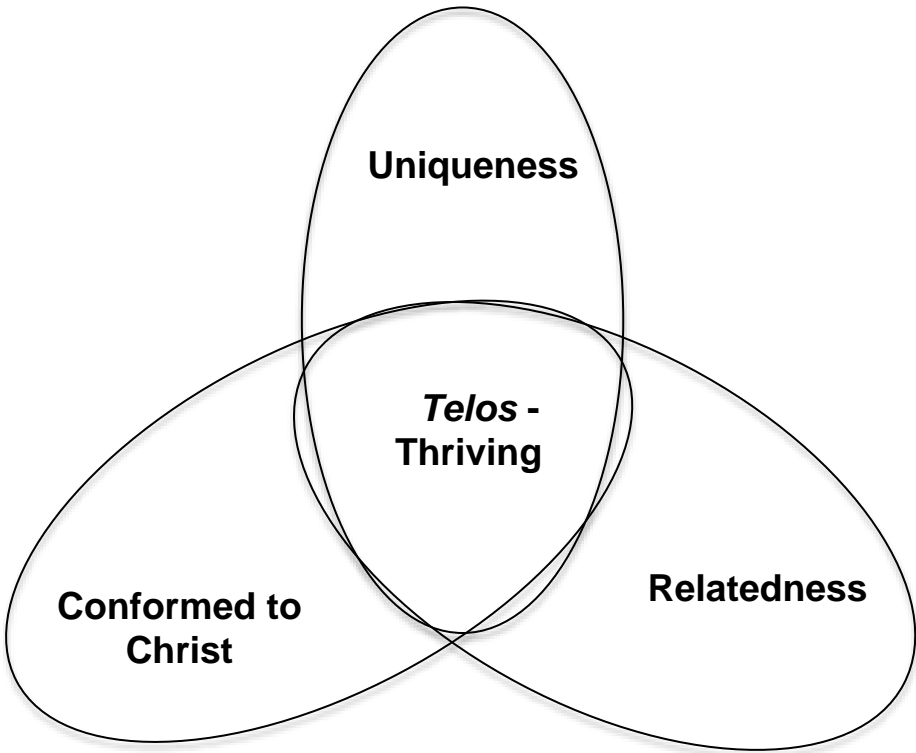
Figure 1: The Three Components of the *Telos* of the Reciprocating Self

unique selves, and (3) more deeply related to God, humankind, and creation. Thriving involves transformation towards *telos* and growing more fully into God's purposes for us—living in deepening intimacy with God and engaging more fully in God's activities on earth as ourselves as we become more like Christ. Christological and trinitarian understandings of the image of God suggest that as humans we are to become more fully differentiated selves in mutual relation with God, humankind,

and creation.[7] Thus, when considering vigorous growth and thriving, *telos* provides the ends towards which we are intended to grow.

The emphasis on reciprocity and relationality is essential to a Christian understanding of telos and necessary to emphasize because much of western culture and western psychology run contrary. Psychology offers numerous theories that implicitly or explicitly promote the development of the autonomous self as a telos. In fact, generally within Western psychology, relationships or interdependence are treated as a means to an independent self, which is lauded as the goal. Such approaches run the risk of rendering telos as a personal development project or the latest self-help trend. Distinct to the concept of thriving are the mutually beneficial relationships beyond the self.[8] Telos and purpose are not focused on self-actualization or self-elevation rather, telos involves lifting others up. Reciprocating selves are interdependent people, in mutual relationship with God, humans, and creation.

Throughout Christian history, many have identified different goals or *teloi* of the Christian life. For example, Augustine offered the beatific vision of unity with God in Christ. The first question of the Westminster Catechism is, "What is the chief end of (hu)mankind?" To which the answer is, "To glorify God and enjoy God forever."[9] The Reciprocating Self aligns with

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[7] Balswick, King, and Reimer, *Reciprocating Self* and King, "Reciprocating Self," 15–32.

[8] Pamela E. King et al., "Mind the Gap: Evolutionary Psychological Perspectives on Human Thriving," *Journal of Positive Psychology* 13.4 (July 2018): 1–10. Flourishing and wellbeing are individual constructs that often affirm the importance of a personally meaningful life, whereas thriving is defined by the presence of mutually beneficial relationships between the individual and the systems in which they live, which means that individuals make socially meaningful contributions to the world around them.

[9] The Westminster General Assembly 1647, *Westminster Shorter*

these notions. The Christological and trinitarian understandings of the *imago Dei* foundation to the Reciprocating Self allow for exploring psychological insight into the process of formation. Specifically, the Reciprocating Self *telos* conveys that in growing in unity with God, we become conformed to Christ as our unique selves. Similarly, we fully glorify and enjoy God when we live into our strengths and serve out of our passions as a response to God's love and grace. Stanley Grenz wrote, "Glorifying the Father in the Son (through the Spirit) together with all creation is the ultimate expression of the *imago Dei* and therefore marks the *telos* for which humans were created in the beginning."[10] From a Christian perspective, *thriving is growing into the fullness of our own uniqueness as we are conformed to Christ, using our particular gifts, skills, and passions for participation in God's purposes.* Thriving is fully becoming with and for others, in Christ and for Christ.

Vocation, vocation, vocation

What does *telos* and thriving have to do with vocation? Stemming from my Reformed roots, I align with Calvin and others who agree that vocation is not a static sort of "sentry post." It is not fixed, rigid, or permanent, nor is it a specific position or designation to a discerned divinely-appointed duty until death. Rather, vocation is an ongoing and active calling on the entirety of our lives. As represented throughout this volume, vocation is a calling on all our being, not just our job! Although vocation involves what we *do* with our lives, it begins with who we *are* and continues with who we *are becoming* throughout our lives. Similar to thriving, vocation involves becoming, and *telos* provides the

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Catechism with Proof Texts (ESV): An Aid for Study of the Holy Bible (ed. Robert B. Balsinger; CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2010), 10.

[10] Stanley Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 327.

direction towards which vocation aims. Vocation is different from thriving, because thriving describes the process of transforming towards *telos*; whereas vocation is our intentional and active consent to engage with God's purposes. From this perspective, vocation is a proactive kind of living characterized by movement toward a goal—towards *telos*.

John Webster articulated the deep connection between vocation and becoming. He noted that Christian theological anthropology is not a "celebration of a general principle of 'becoming,'" nor cultivation of the self for the self's sake.[11] Rather, understanding human becoming as God intends, or thriving, is a "shapely" process and one that involves "ordered fulfillment through calling," in which individuals participate in the loving and gracious work that the triune God has appointed to humankind. The becoming, developing, growing, and improving associated with thriving is not random, but rather given order and direction through calling.

Telos as the Ends and Means of Vocation

Telos is helpful to understand vocation as a calling on the totality of our lives in relationship with God. Specifically, *telos* informs the direction towards which all of our lives aim and provides a framework for who we are to become. The *telos* of the Reciprocating Self provides a flexible structure for considering the formation of one's vocation to include one's uniqueness, the ways in which one is becoming more like Christ, and how one is related to and contributing to the greater world (see Figure 2).

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[11] John Webster, "The Human Person," *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 231.

Telos provides insight not only into the ends of vocation, but also the practical means of pursuing vocation. In general, *telos*
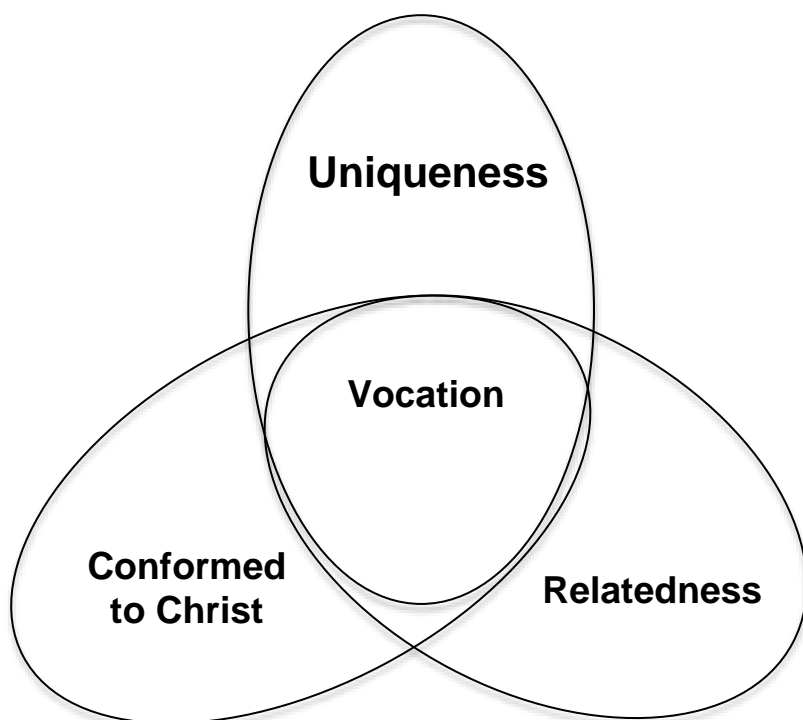
Figure 2: Vocation from Christological and Trinitarian teleological perspective

is determined by intended design. Consequently, *telos* informs the nature of the completed project and provides the directions for completion. Practically speaking, the threefold understanding of *telos* offers a framework for thinking about *what* vocation is and provides insight into *how* we discover, hone, and pursue vocation. Vocation formation occurs through our active and genuine connection with ourselves, others, creation, and God. Thus, not only is engagement with the world part of our *telos*, but our ongoing relatedness to God, others, and the world leads us to a deepening discovery of our call into in God's ongoing work in the world.

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Based on my assertion above, in what follows I synthesize both theological and psychological understandings of the thriving process through which we grow towards *telos* in our capacity to pursue purpose or vocation, and offer categories for consideration in the process of discerning vocation.[12]

Whose vocation?

First, when considering theologically rich concepts like vocation, it is important to be aware of our culturally informed meanings and biases. *Telos* is a helpful concept because it allows us to consider vocation from our best understanding of God's perspective. Christian *telos* is defined by an alternative order — one set forth and defined by the pattern, the *logos* of Christ, and salvation is an invitation to live according to the new order. This is extremely important to be mindful of in our current era of hyper-individualism. When considering vocation from a Christian perspective, we must realize that "our" vocation is as much God's call on our life as it is our answer to that call. Vocation is our active consent and participation in fulfilling *God's purposes.* Therefore, the ultimate purpose of vocation is not our own — not our family's, nor our community's.

This reality does not belittle individual or communal significance, rather it affirms human dignity because individual

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[12] The content of this chapter draws upon my work as a developmental scientist and particularly focuses on relational developmental systems theory, plasticity, adaptive developmental regulation, positive youth development. See King and Whitney, "Positive Psychology," 47–59; King, "The Reciprocating Self," 15–32; Pamela E. King, "Joy Distinguished," 33–39; Pamela E. King and Frederic Defoy, "Joy as a Virtue: The Means and Ends of Joy," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* (2020): 1–24; and Pamela E. King and Casey E. Clardy, "Prevention and the Promotion of Thriving in Children and Adolescents," *Christianity and Developmental Psychopathology: Theory and Application for Working with Youth* (eds. Kelly S. Flanagan and Sarah E. Hall; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 179–202.

and/or communal purpose is given meaning by being part of God's purposes. For some, our lives may be given extraordinary meaning because we are deeply woven into a community (such as family or ethnicity) that is so powerful that we are empowered and obligated. However, God's call is both on us as individuals and as collectives. Thus, our vocation involves not only individual active consent, but in many cases vocation may involve communal consent of families, congregations, or communities to collective participation in God's work in the world. In other words, our lives matter because they are part of God's greater and expansive ongoing work in the world. Whether our identity is predominantly individual or collective (e.g. family, ethnicity), our greater call—for ourselves or our people—is to participate in God's ongoing work in the world.

From a narrative perspective, our purpose can be understood as the role we play in God's ongoing story—the Gospel.[13] Paul writes from this perspective in his letter to the Philippians, "I press to the goal of God's upward vocation" (Phil 3:14). Vocation is how we understand our way of playing a unique part in God's redemptive purposes and consummation. Within the Christian tradition, we have different ways of describing this reality. Paul admonishes believers to be Christ's ambassadors and agents of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:16–20). Alternatively, we might think of ourselves as participating in the ongoing work of the Spirit. Harry Kuitert emphasized that we are called to image God by living as covenant partners with the natural order.[14] From N. T. Wright's perspective, vocation is not simply an acceptance of

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[13] Pamela E. King, "An Invitation to Thrive: Helping Young People Find Their Coordinates," *Fuller Studio* (2017): https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/invitation-thrive-helping-young-people-find-coordinates/ (accessed 10/10/19).

[14] See Harry Kuitert in Richard J. Mouw, "The Imago Dei and Philosophical Anthropology," *Christian Scholar's Review* 41.3 (Spring 2012): 253–66.

what God has done through the cross, but also an embrace of our part in God's ongoing and unfolding story of covenantal faithfulness.[15] Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun insist that individual flourishing happens in relationship with the broader world's flourishing. They note that Paul's vision of eschatological transformation requires that "fully flourishing human life is inseparable from the flourishing of the creation as a whole."[16]

All of these point to a much grander reality and perspective than a focus on one's individual vocation or even one's immediate collective vocation. *Telos* reorients us from self-preoccupation or my-people preoccupation towards a view of vocation in light God's purposes. Therefore, vocation shifts from being understood as one's personal project or even my people's project to being part of the design of the Divine. Joel Green captures the grand vision of vocation: "Our human vocation, given and enabled by God, is to relate to God as God's partner in covenant. To join in companionship of the human family and in relation to the whole cosmos in ways that reflect the covenant love of God. This is realized and modeled supremely in Jesus Christ."[17] Each person and each people group (e.g., family, congregation, affinity group) are part of the shared mission of humanity that is ultimately part of God's purposes.

Entirety of life

In this way, vocation is a response to Paul's admonition to offer our lives as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God as an

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[15] N. T. Wright, "Redemption from the New Perspective? Towards a Multi-Layered Pauline Theology of the Cross," *The Redemption: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Christ as Redeemer* (eds. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 86.

[16] Volf and Croasmun, *Life of the World*, 172.

[17] Joel B. Green, "Resurrection of the Body: New Testament Voices Concerning Personal Community and the Afterlife," *What About the Soul?* (ed. Joel B. Green; Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 85–100.

act of spiritual worship (Rom 12:1). This notion of living our lives as worship to God emphasizes that all of our lives are to be "the aroma of Christ" (2 Cor 2:15). As described above, vocation is an active consent to an intentional way of living in and for Christ. So, although we often think of work as the context in which we fulfill the call of vocation, it involves all of our lives—all the roles we play as family, friends, leaders, member, and so on. Vocation involves living our lives in a way that aligns our beliefs, values, identity, and actions; and thus, is more thoroughly understood as a holistic process of becoming and not limited to an issue of professional development.

In the current cultural zeitgeist, which emphasizes being strength-based and the pursuit of happiness, we have to remember the radical call of vocation on all of our lives. As much as thriving involves leading and serving out of our strengths, passions, and giftedness, the power that comes from living out of the depth of our woundedness is essential for vocation. Vocation requires all of us—including our weaknesses and vulnerabilities. We know that God's power is made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor 4) and always surpasses our own strength—even on a good hair day. However, we often overlook that God's call is on the breadth and depths of our lives—even the dark crevices. Vocation is forged, strengthened, and refined in the crucibles of life. Whether discrimination, poverty, violence, or violation, we are often forced to gain skills to survive—that we can apply in other contexts and use to eventually thrive. A friend of mine testifies that he is effective as he is in his own vocation, precisely because of his challenging life experiences. We experience abundant life— not in the absence or the avoidance of pain or death, but in the face of it. That said, growth through suffering is not an excuse for injustice.

Christian vocation necessitates that we offer all of our lives as living sacrifices. To do so, we must first accept our full selves— even those places of great shame, disappointment, and loss. We

cannot fully pursue vocation if we are spending energy rejecting or denying various parts of our selves or lives. God is present with us in all things and claims all of our lives. Although we are forgiven in Christ and God sees us as new creations, we must embark on the important spiritual and psychological work of loving ourselves and allowing ourselves to be renewed in order to live fully for God. For then, we will be able to intentionally offer all of our lives. We cannot serve or lead with vitality and feel alive, if we are dead to parts of ourselves. We must, with God's Spirit, breathe life into the parts of ourselves that we have denied. We do not do this alone, but with God and the companionship of God's people.

The reality is, if we cannot love all of ourselves and see ourselves through God's eyes, how will we be able to rightly see others? Until we fully see ourselves with God's eyes as beloved creations, we cannot know our place among the rest of God's creation. Without accurate vision, how will we see and know amongst whom, where, and how to live out our vocation? We must be able to see both ourselves and others as fellow sojourners on the path to restoration and flourishing.

Ongoing

Like thriving, vocation involves an ongoing process of transformation towards *telos*. Although one might get hired for a job, one does not "get" a vocation. As Tod Bolsinger wrote, "Vocation is formed, not found."[18] As a developmental psychologist and from the perspective of thriving, I suggest that vocation is not found nor formed, but always forming—and reforming throughout one's life. As shared at the beginning of this chapter, I came to understand my vocation in my mid-twenties as

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[18] Tod Bolsinger, "Formed, Not Found," *Fuller Studio* (2014): https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/formed-not-found/(accessed 10/10/19).

understanding and activating thriving. I have lived this call out in numerous ways at different seasons of my life, whether in the congregation, the classroom, the lab, the community, or at home. Although the activities of the various roles or jobs I have had have changed over time, there is a theme that runs through them. While the through line is not linear, looking back, I can see how my many life experiences have equipped me for unique contributions to God's ongoing work in the world.

My experience has been that the meaning of vocation lasts and endures, but how it is lived out transforms with changing life circumstances. The growth and decline in our bodies and minds, the flux in our families, the needs of our community, or the historical circumstances all continue to influence how we live out our vocation.

As Christians, we often use the words *calling* and *vocation* synonymously. Considering "calling" as a verb that denotes activity and insinuates both the initiation of the caller and the response of the called provides important nuance and meaning to a Christian understanding of calling and vocation. In fact, emphasizing the progressive tense of "calling" points to the continuing action of calling. There is not one call, but an ongoing calling and responding between the Creator and created in which the created is invited, activated, and supported by the Creator through the Spirit in the Son to live more deeply into their vocation.

Relational

The fact that calling emphasizes a caller and a called highlights that vocation is relational. Vocation involves knowing the other and being known. Thus, calling and vocation are a two-way enterprise. In the context of intimacy with God and others, our lives and our personhood are forged. In truth, who we are becoming has as much to do with relating as it does with doing. At our deepest physical, psychological, and spiritual levels, we

are molded and remolded in relationships. Those relationships that are most empowering and constructive for formation are characterized by love, intimacy, and accountability.[19]

Across academic disciplines, we are witnessing a relational revolution. From neuroscience to health sciences, to anthropology, to psychology—these disciplines are going through a paradigm shift that not only recognizes but prioritizes the reality that humans are relational and social beings. For instance, developmental psychology bases all of human development on reciprocity between an individual and the many systems in which a person lives. Practically speaking, it is through the bi-directional influences, the back and forth of exchanges, that development occurs. Identity and calling do not appear in isolation, but rather are forged in the ongoing interactions we experience in our schools, jobs, families, and community. Being relational beings is part of our makeup and fundamental to imaging God.

Consequently, although filling out questionnaires, journaling, and self-inquiry are helpful for identifying strengths and passions, vocation is ultimately a relational enterprise and is discerned in context of relationships with those who know us, those we serve, and God.

To this end, cultures with more collectivist leanings may be more apt to nurture vocation through an emphasis on relationships. In some contexts family and community priorities may be valued over individual priorities, identity may be communal as much as personal, and/or interdependence may be a necessity because of adversity. When a person views themselves as part of a collective, they see their purpose as contributing not only to personal goals but communal ones.

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[19] See Balswick, King, and Reimer, "Reciprocating Relationships," *Reciprocating Self*, 56–75.

Not only cultural perspectives, but economic perspectives have implications for the relationality of vocation formation. Given that vocational discernment not only requires a mindset or strengthening your relationship with God or evening deepening your connections with people around you, but it involves pursuing goals and gaining competencies. There are often many real, tangible, practical, and often painful obstacles that keep people from pursuing their passions and realizing their sense of God's call on their life. Although these experiences ultimately lead us to know and embrace our call, many of us need additional support from others to figure out how to live a meaningful, joy-filled life of vocation and thrive. Being a part of a community matters not just so we can realize our goals, but so we can assist others. For when we enable others to thrive, we thrive.

Given this relational reality, we must emphatically remember that vocation is foremost a response to God's love. We are called through love, transformed by love, and are called to love as we are uniquely gifted. In this way, one might say that vocation hatches in the incubator of love and intimacy with God! We must always stay connected to that love. Henri Nouwen wrote, "Your vocation is to be a witness to God's love in this world."[20]

Active

Maintaining that connection necessitates intentionality. Vocation is not only relational and ongoing, but it involves *active* engagement of both the caller and called. Vocation and true becoming transpire in our active participation—receiving and responding to the life of the Triune God in the social and contextual realms in which we are embedded. Vocational discernment involves staying dialed into the love of God, which

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[20] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey Though Anguish to Freedom* (New York: Double Day, 1996), 93.

necessitates active listening and wise responding. Discernment is not like deciphering a code where we break the code and forever have the key to interpret God's messages to us. Discernment involves ongoing faithfulness in disposing ourselves to God's love and listening to God's invitations through Scripture, prayer, community, and the world around us. However, discernment also involves responding to those invitations. It is in active responding that we further hear and experience God's call through affirmation, consolation, and desolation. In other words, we actively test our calling and vocation. We try new things, take on new jobs, live with new communities. Through these experiences we keep ourselves open to God and sense God's nudges—sometimes as deep confirmation or radical pruning. Regardless, our foremost call is to avail ourselves to God's love.

Making this point, after moving to Latin America and realizing this was not part of his vocation, Henri Nouwen affirmed the centrality of his relationship with God as his primary call. He wrote, "My broader vocation is simply to enjoy God's presence, do God's will, and be grateful wherever I am. The question of where to live and what to do is really insignificant compared to the question of how to keep the eyes of my heart focused on the Lord. . . . There is no such thing as the right place or the right job. . . . Turning to the Lord fully, unconditionally, and without fear *is*" what is central to vocation.[21]

We are active agents in the journey of vocation. It is our first duty to dispose ourselves to the love of God. Through actively abiding in God, we find life and gain new identity and vocation that we would never be able to achieve on own terms.[22] Thus, vocation is always active and never passive. It involves

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[21] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 107 (emphasis original).

[22] Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 56.

ongoing discovery about ourselves, those close to us, the world beyond us, and God. It not only involves praying, discerning, waiting, and listening — but also engaging, seeking, experimenting, innovating, and exploring. Consequently, vocation requires a posture of receptivity, not passivity. If we are drawn too deeply into the vortex of frenzied activity, we will not able to hear or experience God calling. Consequently, we must take heed and balance full engagement with God's world and rest. Honing and sustaining vocation requires a Sabbath informed rhythm of activity, rest, and reflection to maintain receptivity and responsiveness.

Joyful

When our vocation is aligned with God's purposes for us, we experience joy. Joy is a chief end of the Christian life[23] and is central to vocation. From a psychological perspective, joy as a fruit of the Spirit is best understood as a virtue that involves knowing, feeling, and doing what matters most.[24] Consequently, joy in itself is deeply tied to one's understanding of *telos*. When aligned with one's *telos* — living into one's strengths, contributing to the world beyond the self and living out one's spiritual and ethical ideals — we experience more joy.

Vast psychological research, including studies of well-being, self-concordance, noble purpose, and life strivings,[25]

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[23] Cf. Westminster Assembly (1643–1652) above.

[24] King, "Joy Distinguished," 33–39 and King and Defoy, "Joy as a Virtue," 1–24.

[25] Carol D. Ryff and Corey L. M. Keyes, "The Structure of Psychological Well-Being Revisited," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69.4 (1995): 719–27. Kennon M. Sheldon and Andrew J. Elliot, "Goal Striving, Need Satisfaction, and Longitudinal Well-Being: The Self-Concordance Model," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 76.3 (1999): 482–97. William Damon, *The Path to Purpose: Helping Our Children Find Their Calling in Life* (New York: Free Press, 2008). Robert A. Emmons, *The Psychology of Ultimate Concerns: Motivation and Spirituality*

support this claim and suggest that well-being and positive emotions are experienced when one lives with coherence of values, attitudes, identity, and behaviors. The *telos* of the Reciprocating Self provides a framework for understanding why joy is most profoundly experienced and cultivated when people (1) live more authentically, (2) are engaged with others and the world in meaningful ways, and (3) live in alignment with their ethical ideals. As such, vocation is the fullest expression of *telos* in the current life.

Not only does pursuing vocation promote joy, but attuning to joy enables one to live out vocation more fully. Increasing attention to what brings a person joy can serve to point them in the direction of their calling. Attuning to what activities, relationships, and circumstances bring joy highlights areas of personal strength, places of fulfilling and rewarding engagement, and sources of meaning. Conversely, attending to joy also points to loss, regret, longing for fulfillment, or lament. Such awareness can serve to affirm or challenge one's notion of calling. At a very practical level, habitual reflection on feelings of joy and gratitude can serve to highlight life-giving activities and relationships that inform vocation. Additionally, being mindful of when and where one most fully experiences God's presence, having a sense of cooperating with God's Spirit, or feeling most alive are all ways of attuning to sources of joy and vocation. Attending to sorrow and desolation can point towards areas in which we need God's healing, presence, forgiveness, strength, and/or hope. The Prayer of Examen is a spiritual practice that guides one's attention towards their desires and God's presence in their lives in a way that allows a deepening awareness of God's calling in their life.[26]

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in Personality (New York: Guilford, 1999).

[26] Herbert Alphonso, S.J., *Discovering Your Personal Vocation: The Search for Meaning through the Spiritual Exercises* (Maywah, NJ: Paulist, 2001); see also "Prayer of Examen," *Fuller Studio* (2019): https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/prayer-of-examen/ (accessed 10/10/

Additionally, regular journaling, other forms of prayer, meditation, and sharing with others can serve to illuminate a sense of call. Routine observance of the micro-movements of our day often gives way to the greater meaning of our lives. In addition, attending to feelings of joy and sorrow can direct our attention to sensitive and vulnerable places in our lives that are well suited for growth and transformation. It is often in these tender times in which we gain glimpses of vocation and clues that inform us of God's purposes for us.

For Christians, joy is anticipatory and reminds us of what is to come. We rejoice in experiencing the goodness of God's creation in the present life, but joy reminds us that this is a foretaste of the surpassing fullness that awaits on the other side of this life. In this way, joy is powerful because it serves to direct us towards vocation, reminds of God's promises, and serves to motivate us and propel us towards these ends. From a neurological perspective, the positive emotion of joy activates our brain's reward center, making us feel good and thereby incentivizes us to continue to pursue sources of joy in our life.[27] In addition, positive emotions enable our brains to be more relaxed, less rigid, and more open to others, innovation, and creativity.[28] This enables us to pursue vocation more effectively.

In summary, joy is essential to vocation because it alerts us to when our desires are aligned with God's desire. Joy confronts us with the reality of the disparity between what God intends and what presently is. Joy does not suspend us idly over this gap, but provides a bridge of hope. It gives a vision of a way forward and

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[27] Philip C. Watkins et al., "Joy is a Distinct Positive Emotion: Assessment of Joy and Relationship to Gratitude and Well-Being," *Journal of Positive Psychology* 13.5 (2020): 522–39.

[28] Barbara L. Fredrickson, "The Role of Positive Emotions in Positive Psychology: The Broaden-and Build Theory of Positive Emotions," *American Psychologist* 56.3 (2001): 218–26.

motivation, and will to engage and work toward the fulfillment of God's purposes. Being mindful of this disparity points to our need for Christ, as well as a life of discipleship and worship for ongoing transformation. Consequently, joy is an important source of vocational renewal because it guides and motivates us. It keeps us connected to God's vision and enlivens us to pursue our purpose within the context of God's purposes.

Conclusion

Through encountering God's love and grace, salvation frees us up to become ourselves in relationship to God. Vocation is our joyful and active consent to the "performance of the task of being God's reconciled creature pointed to perfection."[29] We become free through the loving work of God who liberates us to contribute to God's greater purposes as ourselves and as God's people. When we pursue vocation as God's beloved, we continue to be reconciled, renewed, and released to thrive and become most fully human. But we must be reminded that we are not solely in the business of becoming for ourselves, but for a greater end: to glorify God. The Christian sense of purpose is not untethered *telos*. It is not a renegade purpose, not just an unleashing of self. Christian *telos* is anchored in a transcendent narrative—the gospel. A narrative that embraces trauma, loss, grief, beauty, creativity, and vitality—the entirety of human life. Vocation not only offers a vision, but also a way of intentionally pursuing a meaningful life that encompasses all of who we are and who we can become in God, for God. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, we are saved from sin and death, and saved for glorifying God. From this perspective, Irenaeus' quotation, "The glory of God, is the (hu)man fully alive," is theologically and psychologically profound. When we become most fully ourselves in Christ and for Christ, we shine light into

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[29] Webster, "Human Person," 231.

this world and glorify God.

Thus, calling is an invitation to liberation so that we may become more fully human in pursuing God's purposes. From this perspective, discipleship is a process of transformation and freedom for participating in God's continued work in the world as our unique selves. Such an understanding has massive implications for reordering worship, mission, discipleship, and therefore theological education. When we broaden our understanding of vocation beyond a job to a matter of joy — to a matter of becoming and thriving with and for others, we realize Christian leaders must be equipped to enable people to hear God's invitation in all contexts. The current emphasis on saving people from death and sin, or even on church attendance, falls short of the radical invitation to follow Christ and respond with the entirety of our lives in the contexts in which God has placed us. In an era where people are struggling and groping for meaning, belonging, and purpose, there is no time like the present to clarify how we equip Christian leaders to understand their vocation as part of God's grand purposes of redemption, restoration, and consummation, so that they may do the same for all God's people. For when Christians live into the heft and gravitas of their call as part of God's ongoing work in this world, their lives have a compelling weight and draw others through the Spirit into God's transformative love and purposes of becoming for God's glory.

For further reading

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The Unknown Vocational Motivations of Seminary Students

Knowing Yourself Inside and Out

Brad D. Strawn and Jonathan Doctorian

Tyler,[1] a Caucasian male, grew up in the south in a nominally Christian home. His father had a particular entrepreneurial acumen and the family was financially quite well off. Tyler's parents employed a laissez-faire childrearing style with little to no rules or boundaries. Social image was important to the family which was clearly seen in the size and quality of their home, cars, clothes, etc. The children were treated lavishly, engaging in expensive past times and wanting for nothing.

While Tyler was a model child, his three siblings were very different. Binge drinking and drug use lead to addictions in Tyler's siblings, and although parenting discipline was scarce, when Tyler's siblings landed in trouble, the father would suddenly become severely authoritative, which led to yelling and even violent encounters.

As a child, Tyler recalled thinking that if he could be a "good boy" this might take pressure off his parents and reduce conflict. So, he did his best to stay out of trouble and not to be a problem. As the "good boy," Tyler also served as both his parents confident during conflict and an emotional sounding board for his upset siblings. Tyler found a sense of pride and self-efficacy in his

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[1] Tyler is an amalgamations of several pastors we have known over the years.

ability to help upset people. He became a "gifted child"[2] whose job was to "parent" his parents.

In the middle of this fairly dysfunctional home life, Tyler met Christ through a Christian ministry at his high school. After this Tyler was on fire. Shortly thereafter he felt a call into full-time ministry. From there, his faith journey sky rocketed. He attended a religious college, majoring in theology, achieving high academic honors, and receiving mentoring by university leaders. After graduating he was accepted at a great seminary, was mentored by a nationally recognized scholar, obtained his M.Div. and walked straight into a youth pastor position. After a few years, Tyler accepted a call to a large nondenominational church as pastor of men's ministries. While serving in this capacity, the lead pastor noted that Tyler had a gift for preaching. He invited Tyler to be a part of the Church's preaching team enabling him to preach every sixth week.

Everything was proceeding very well for Tyler vocationally. Then out of the blue he received a call from a large historic church, in his denomination, asking him to apply for the senior pastor position. Tyler was elated. His ultimate goal was always to be a lead pastor and this church would be a huge step. The selection process was long, but he eventually received the offer and accepted the position.

This is where things began to change for Tyler. Tyler was following in the footsteps of a beloved pastor with a long tenure and a church with a long denominational history. Even though congregational attendance had been dropping before his arrival, the blame was laid squarely at Tyler's feet.

Everywhere Tyler had studied or served he had

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[2] Alice Miller, *The Drama of the Gifted Child* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). Miller describes the "gifted child" as the child unconsciously selected by the narcissistic parent(s) who becomes "gifted" at emotional attunement to their parents' moods in order to soothe them when needed.

progressively grown and accolades had followed. He had been successful, loved, admired, appreciated and continually had people speak favor into his life. He felt blessed. But over the course of two years at the new church, criticism, dissension and outright hostility became the norm. The dropping attendance led to financial problems including budget cuts and staff layoffs. This further incensed some in the congregation who felt that Tyler was not being transparent in his decision-making process and might be up to no good.

Tyler knew, intellectually, that there would be hard days in ministry but his confidence began to wane. He wondered what he had done wrong and why he was taking all these setbacks so personally. He had really never faced challenges or criticism in his ministerial tenure, and he was broken. Every time another parishioner left the church he was devastated. He was slowly and unknowingly becoming depressed.

But perhaps the thing that was most disturbing to Tyler, was how automatic and unbidden his reactions were—especially interpersonally. Tyler found himself becoming defensive, angry and even aggressive when congregants complained or pointed out problems. He began to engage in avoidant behaviors, such as hiding in his office, instructing his assistant to not disturb him, and even slipping away from supportive friends and family. And when Tyler was preparing a Sunday morning sermon, he had to check himself that he didn't craft a defensive or accusatory message aimed at the congregation.

While Tyler continued to engage in spiritual disciplines that had been important to him in the past, he now felt like his prayers hit the ceiling, scripture felt dull and boring, and he begin to feel abandoned by God. Tyler even began to question his "call." Maybe he had been wrong, maybe God hadn't wanted him in full-time ministry. Maybe he just wasn't cut out for this. It was then that a long-time friend, whom Tyler trusted, suggested he enter therapy. He did.

How are we to understand a scenario like Tyler's? Are there ways in which his past influenced his choice of vocation and the way he lived it out? Would knowing the impact of his history help him in his present ministry? These are the kinds of questions that this chapter attempts to explore.

Emotional Biographies

The disciplines of psychology and theology recognize that one's experiences of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, and religious tradition shape a person into who they are. These demographic issues impact how one reads the Bible, thinks theologically, ministers ecclesiologically, and affects one's relationship with God. If this is true, wouldn't one's family and relational history also have an impact? We refer to this as one's *emotional biography* (EB). EBs describe one's relational history, both in and out of the family, and how this history impacts a person. EBs affect one's self-perception, emotional capacities, relational skills, and many other essential abilities that will enhance or hinder one's interpersonal functioning.

EBs do not reside in our conscious awareness. They reside in what neuroscientists call the cognitive unconscious (CU). The CU can powerfully direct one's thoughts, feelings and behaviors without our conscious awareness. The human brain has limited attentional capacities so it developed in ways that quickly size up a situation (based on pattern recognition/memories) and act without a person's conscious awareness.[3] This explains everything from our relational patterns to how we can drive a car without thinking. Cognitive scientists now estimate that over 90% of human behavior is automatic; it does not require our conscious awareness. So while EBs powerfully direct our lives, they are not

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[3] This is the evolutionary capacity that cognitive scientists have named "thinking fast." In situations where one's survival is at stake, it is better to jump to the wrong conclusion that the rustling in the bushes is a predator and escape then wait around to find out.

destiny. Becoming conscious of one's EBs - getting to know yourself inside and out—facilitates the difficult process of changing one's automatic behaviors and learning newer and healthier ones.

Let us be clear about what we are *not* saying in this chapter. We are not attempting to question the concept of a divine call,[4] but rather we are offering an opportunity to consider how one's humanity may impact one's unconscious motivation toward a vocation in ministry. We are positing that there are factors at work motivating one toward ministry which are outside of awareness. Some of these factors are healthy and some unhealthy. Unhealthy motivations may direct us toward unhealthy behaviors. These factors reside in our EBs and identifying them, and working on them, will lead to a more resilient pastor and a more joyful living out of one's call.

We now describe some unconscious motivational features emanating from EBs that may motivate one toward ministry.

Ministerial Motivation

What motivates an individual to enter full-time ministry? Most ministers would immediately recognize this question as complicated. While different denominations have various protocols for assessing pastoral candidates fit for ministry,[5] there is no agreed upon definition of "calling." Because the empirical

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[4] While Brad is a licensed psychologists and professor and Jonathan is a doctoral candidate in clinical psychology, both Brad and Jonathan are ordained elders in the church of the Nazarene and hold pastoral positions in local churches. We are deeply supportive of the church and the men and women who serve her in professional roles.

[5] There is a long history of pastoral assessment primarily in main line denominations, but even that is changing as non-denominational churches and seminaries may require or offer assessment of some kind. It is not always clear if these assessments are to question one's "call" or to aid a pastoral candidate in recognizing "blind spots" that may negatively impact their ministry.

literature on pastors is scarce, we are forced to combine empirical findings and theory as well as find a comparison group for pastors. This means we must hold our conclusions loosely. First, we mention a few motivations that we describe as conscious in that they are easy to recognize in oneself.

First, the most stated motivation is a "divine call from God." God may call a person through audible or visible manifestations or a felt sense. We call this the "*called motivation*." Second, is what we call the "*gifts and talents*" motivation. Here researchers have directly asked those that have been called how they understand the call which led to conclusions that a person's call is motivated by the gifts God has given them.[6] A third motivation is related in which researchers have attempted to pinpoint personality profiles that are particular to seminarians as compared to non-seminarians:[7] we call this the "*personality motivation*." While differences have been found, these studies have not been replicated and it is not clear what these differences mean. Could it mean that a person would be motivated toward ministry because their traits are particularly beneficial to ensure success, resiliency and a positive sense of self-worth? A fourth motivation emerges from stories in which an important mentor, or in some cases an entire church body speaks, into a young person's life suggesting that they should be a pastor. This fulfills a prophetic role for the young person, which is why we call this the "*prophetic motivation*."

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[6] Karen Longman et al., "Conceptualizing of Calling: A Grounded Theory Exploration of CCCU Women Leaders," *Christian Higher Education* 10 (2011): 254–75.

[7] Bonita Ekhardt and W. Mack Goldsmith, "Personality Factors of Men and Women Pastoral Candidates Part 1: Motivational Profiles," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 12.2 (1984): 109–18 and Paul Galea, "Identifying Personality Features Related to Religious Vocation: A Comparison Between Seminarians and Their Peers Using the NEO Personality Inventory (revised)," *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* 32.2 (2010): 169–77.

This list of motivations (i.e., *Divine call, gifts and talents, personality, prophetic*) is not exhaustive, nevertheless, awareness of these motivations may be helpful for several reasons. First, if an individual knows what qualities they possess (i.e., gifts, talents and personality traits) it may be an advantage in using them effectively, developing them, and not being blindsided by any inevitable weaknesses that may be paired with their strengths. Second, a person who has experienced the "prophetic motivation" should discern if this is truly God's call or a projection of someone else's wishes.

These motivations are primarily what we would call conscious (i.e., one can fairly easily know these things about oneself) but what about motivations that may be operative but "unknown?" What might be residing in one's EB and because of its hidden status, may be motivationally powerful, at times leading to disastrous outcomes?

Unconscious Motivations for Pastoral Ministry

No experimental research on unconscious motivations of minsters was located.[8] However, there is a substantial literature on the unconscious motivations of psychotherapists.[9] The literature on psychotherapists is a good comparison group to ministers as both are in the business of helping, deeply interpersonal and emotionally charged. Both occupy positions of authority, are often idealized, and wield tremendous power. While there are clear differences, an important similarity, is both are highly personal. One does not just *do* pastoral or therapy work, one *is* a pastor or a therapist. In many ways these vocations shape

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[8] There is a theoretical literature in pastoral psychology that is suggestive of some unconscious motivations, but time and space did not allow this exploration.

[9] For an excellent review of this literature, see Michael B. Sussman, *A Curious Calling: Unconscious Motivations for Practicing Psychotherapy* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1992).

and define one's identity. If a dentist makes a mistake at work, she made a mistake, but if a pastor or therapist makes a mistake this directly implicates them as a *person*. So, because of these significant vocational overlaps, we will explore some of the unconscious vocational motivations of those in psychotherapy practice.

While space does not permit an exploration of all therapists' potential unconscious motivations, three have been identified which resonate with pastors. These motivations fall broadly into three categories: (a) mastering one's own conflicts, (b) working through issues of narcissism, and (c) motivations related to past relationships.

Mastering one's own conflicts

In a pioneering study of the personality patterns of psychiatric residents, Robert Holt and Lester Luborsky concluded that what attracted students to the vocation was an opportunity to master their past.[10] To master one's past is to unconsciously find and/or recreate interpersonal scenarios that were problematic in childhood, in the unconscious hope that they can be reexperienced positively as an adult. Marriage is a common example. A man with a dismissive critical mother (creating low self-worth and anxiety about emotional intimacy with women) ironically marries a woman with similar qualities. The theory posits he is motivated to do this, because the relationship feels "familiar" to him, but also unconsciously it gives him a second chance to transform his wife from dismissive and critical to supportive and available—in a way never possible with his mother.[11] If accomplished, he has mastered his past changing his

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[10] Robert Holt and Lester Luborsky, *Personality Patterns of Psychiatrists: A Study of Methods for Selecting Residents* (New York: Basic Books, 1958), 1.

[11] James L. Framo, *Explorations in Marital and Family Therapy* (New York: Springer, 1982).

past self-representation and his fear of intimacy with women.

The psychotherapy setting is an especially fraught place for a therapist to unconsciously attempt to master one's conflicts. A therapist may have felt "unseen" as a child, but she will become incredibly important to her patients. Is it not possible that seminarians too could be attempting to master past conflicts? Pastors are often considered powerful people, looked up to and respected. They are seen as authorities, smart/wise, and admired. Could not a seminary student with a history of family dysfunction, be attracted to the role of pastor to master the past? It is important to note that this mastery often doesn't work and can backfire leading to major interpersonal difficulties.

Motives related to Narcissism

Narcissism is not always the common image of the braggadocious, impossible to be around, ego maniac. This narcissist is referred to as *grandiose* or *overt*. The issue of narcissism is actually a damaged sense of self.[12] Aaron Pincus and Michael Roche described the narcissistic dilemma as "impairment in the ability to manage and satisfy needs for validation and admiration, such that self-enhancement becomes an overriding goal in nearly all situations and may be sought in maladaptive ways and in inappropriate contexts."[13] This is in contrast to healthy narcissism which is important in mental health,[14] and in leadership if paired with humility.[15]

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[12] Cf. Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, 1977).

[13] Aaron L. Pincus and Michael J. Roche, "Narcissistic Grandiosity and Narcissistic Vulnerability," *Handbook of Narcissism and Narcissistic Personality Disorder* (eds. W. Keith Campbell and Joshua D. Miller; New York: Guilford, 2011), 32.

[14] Constantine Sedikides et al., "Are Normal Narcissists Psychologically Healthy?: Self-Esteem Matters," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 87.3 (2004): 400–16.

[15] Bradley Owens, Angela Wallace, and David Waldman,

The narcissist's dilemma is regulation of self-esteem, but it is complicated. As a child, the narcissist didn't receive from their caregivers vital experiences to build a healthy self; feeling valued, admired and seen in their uniqueness.[16] Therefore, the narcissist's sense of self feels deficient, fractured and fragile. They find it difficult to manage their feelings when they are threatened or challenged. So, while some narcissists protect themselves from shame through grandiosity, others are quiet (i.e., *vulnerable* or *covert*), even appearing humble, but fragility and shame are just as central.[17]

There is a growing body of literature on narcissism in the pastorate. Researchers have noted that the pastoral setting itself may breed narcissism through isolation, unrealistic expectations[18] and idealization.[19] Summarizing the literature, Elizabeth Ruffing et al. stated, "Empirical literature on narcissism in clergy suggests that narcissism is both prevalent and damaging. Existing prevalence studies have some limitations but their findings indicate that narcissism may be more common in clergy samples than in the general population."[20]

"Leader Narcissism and Follower Outcomes: The Counterbalancing Effect of Leader Humility," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 100.4 (2015): 1203–13.

[16] Kohut, *Restoration*.

[17] Steven J. Sandage et al., "Vulnerable Narcissism, Forgiveness, Humility, and Depression: Mediator Effects for Differentiation of Self," *Psychoanalytic Psychology* 34.3 (2017): 300–10.

[18] Wade C. Rowatt and Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "Two Dimensions of Attachment to God and Their Relation to Affect, Religiosity, and Personality Constructs," *Journal of Scientific Study of Religion* 41.4 (2002): 647–51.

[19] Joshua N. Hook et al., "Intellectual Humility and Forgiveness of Religious Leaders," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 10.6 (2015): 499–506.

[20] Elizabeth G. Ruffing et al., "Humility and Narcissism in Clergy: A Relational Spirituality Framework," *Pastoral Psychology* 67.5 (2018): 525–45.

Narcissism is undoubtedly present in ministers. Like other personality traits, narcissism will impact how clergy work, think theologically, and view God and others. Narcissism can have seriously damaging effects on a congregation. Craig Williford and Carolyn Williford wrote about six signs of narcissism in a pastor: "1) all decisions making centers on them; 2) impatience or a lack of ability to listen to others; 3) delegating without giving proper authority or with too many limits; 4) feelings of entitlement; 5) feeling threatened or intimidated by other talented staff; and 6) needing to be the best and brightest in the room."[21]

It is not difficult to imagine how the above may lead to problems. Due to shame, narcissists are not adept at managing failure or receiving constructive criticism. Even if lovingly approached by the congregation, a narcissistic clergy will most likely become defensive and possibly even emotionally aggressive.

Ruffing et al. summarized a number of other studies linking pastoral narcissism to burnout, mental health problems including depression and stress, high-risk taking behavior, and aggression, to name a few.[22] And Hessel Zondag linked covert and overt narcissism to practicing fewer piety practices and making fewer pastoral visits. It is important to note that narcissism is considered to lie on a continuum (one has more or less of the trait) rather than being categorical (you have it or you don't).[23] Understood this way, perhaps it is easier for clergy and therapists to recognize and own some of this trait.

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[21] R. Glenn Ball and Darrell Puls, quoting Craig Williford and Carolyn Williford, "Frequency of Narcissistic Personality Disorder in Pastors: A Preliminary Study" (paper, American Association of Christian Counselors, Nashville, TN, September 26, 2015), 3. Available at http://www.conflicttopeace.com/images/AACC_2015_Paper_NPD_in_Pastors.pdf.

[22] Ruffing, "Humility and Narcissism."

[23] Hessel J. Zondag, "Narcissism and Motivation for the Pastorate," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 19.2 (2006): 227–43.

Given the above, why would having narcissistic traits, unconsciously motivate someone toward the pastorate? Remember, narcissism develops from a childhood deficit in which the child did not receive the basic affirmation, love and building of the self that was required. For this reason, narcissists are hungry for places that can shore up their sense of self, protecting them from shame. The pastorate is a place in which idealization flourishes and a narcissist may find admiration. Pastors are highly influential fueling their sense of importance. But, this can be highly dangerous. Pastors hold multiple roles in congregants' lives. Often there are few boundaries on the ways and types of influence a narcissistic pastor may wield. Covert narcissists will be drawn to the pastorate for similar reasons, but are more likely to work themselves to the bone trying to please everyone and not lose respect. This leads to unrealistic expectations and potential burnout.

Motives involving past relationship configurations

As in the narcissistic motive, this motive is also highly connected with mastering one's past. Here the focus is on particular problematic relationships in one's EB, and the potential consequences. This motive, based on research and clinical theory, hinges on the central ideas that humans are relational beings who develop internal working models of relationships through the early relationships they have with their caregivers.[24] These early relational patterns are unconscious and become automatically activated in present relational situations. Research has consistently demonstrated that the early attachment styles one develops with primary caregivers predicts relationship styles at least into adulthood.[25]

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[24] John Bowlby, *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

[25] For a good review and clinical implications, see David J. Wallin, *Attachment in Psychotherapy* (New York: Guilford, 2007).

One of the early "tasks" of childhood is learning if one's environment is safe. Can the child trust the parent and others or should they be wary? An important issue here is relational dependence. Does the child have the opportunity to experience healthy dependence and care from a caregiver(s)? If so, the child grows into an adult that believes they can trust, depend and hope in others. If, however, a child does not get this experience, if they are rushed to be independent, if they are shamed for dependent behaviors, the relational task of connecting, being interdependent and knowing how to manage relational expectations will be damaged.

Michael Sussman cites research suggesting that mental health professionals often have a historical lack of parental nurturing as well as early traumatic events such as personal illness, separation and divorce.[26] This suggests these individual's dependency needs were not met in healthy ways. Because these feelings reside in one's EB, these helping professionals will not be aware of the impact. These individuals are likely to unconsciously work this out vocationally. Obviously, this will lead to problematic relationships between therapist and patient or pastor and congregant if the pastor/therapist looks to their clients/congregants to meet their dependency needs.

A related theme is now posited by Robert Kegan who believed that throughout the lifespan humans are tasked with making meaning of themselves on the continuum between interpersonal connection and separateness.[27] Why would the therapy or pastoral vocation be attractive to someone who has had a difficult time with this task? If someone had a parental experience where both connectedness and separateness were not balanced in healthy ways, they may find themselves swinging

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[26] Sussman, *Curious Calling*, 134.
[27] Robert Kegan, *The Evolving Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

back and forth between poles in unhealthy ways. Pastors and therapists are expected to connect with people in deep and meaningful ways. It is easy to imagine a scenario where a pastor or therapist, who was connection depleted, might unconsciously use their vocation to connect for their own benefit rather than the patient's or congregant's. Too often this may lead to boundary crossings and violations which have disastrous consequences for all involved.

On the other end of the continuum, the pastorate and therapy vocations could be attractive to those that thrive for separateness. Smothering families may create a person wary of connection and hungry for separateness. Pastors and therapists are great at short bursts of intimacy, (e.g., the 50-minute hour, the handshake at the door as congregants exit the sanctuary). These vocations allow for deep connection in small doses that don't become overwhelming. But it may be difficult for this person to maintain intimacy for a lengthy period. These pastors may also be interpersonally misread as aloof.

A final theme we will discuss is power and control.[28] Parental and child relationships are the central stage upon which issues of power and control are first worked out. This includes everything from toilet training, what emotions or behaviors are allowed, to physical proximity. The challenges of the "terrible twos," that are repeated again in adolescence, are about power and control and the anxiety and ambivalence of all parties involved.

The pastorate and therapist vocations may hold a strong unconscious attraction for individuals struggling with issues of power. Not experiencing emotionally healthy power and self-efficacy as a child, an adult might be attracted to therapy or the pastorate because both roles wield considerable power. It's not hard to imagine how this could go wrong, e.g., when a pastor or

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[28] Sussman, *Curious Calling*.

therapist holds onto their power or authority to the detriment of patient or congregation. Some people may be afraid of power and attempt to relinquish it. In the pastorate, this might be disguised as "working collaboratively" or "wanting to empower staff," but at the end of the day, important decisions do not get made. Balance is key, which only comes with self-awareness.

Knowing Yourself Inside and Out

We believe that unconscious motivations bring with them serious issues for pastors who must work on them to avoid hurting their vulnerable laypeople. However, while some of the motivations that have led them to ministry are maladaptive, this doesn't negate their divine calling or the fact that they may become very good ministers. It doesn't negate that they also enter the work with altruistic reasons and positive gifts and talents. Pain, trauma or dysfunction in one's life doesn't mean one will be a poor pastor or therapist. Christ redeems pain and trauma creating persons that are good listeners and highly empathic.

Therapists in training are required, or strongly encouraged, to enter their own personal therapy. We believe this should be true for ministers as well. Therapy means developing a relationship with a genuine caring person, with specialized training, who can help one understand, and work through, the ways in which one's EB may disastrously impact one's vocation.

Therapy is not the only way to know yourself inside and out, but its advantage is that there is a person there who sees, catches and confronts you on maladaptive motivations, which lead to maladaptive behaviors. Growth groups, designed to help members learn about themselves may be extremely helpful. Spiritual direction may also assist pastors in recognizing blind spots and roadblocks. Of course, God may speak directly to a seminarian or pastor, so spiritual disciplines are essential. We suggest being involved in several growth opportunities, not only for multiple perspectives but for greater protection against self-

deception.

Returning to Tyler

If we attempt to examine Tyler's motivations for entering ministry we find several helpful clues that may aid him in his difficult situation. In real life the unconscious motivations usually operate simultaneously, overlapping and intermingling.

Tyler emerges from a dysfunctional family where we find evidence of poor parenting (e.g., no boundaries), high emotional conflict, addiction and abuse. Tyler has filled the "family role" as both the "good boy" and the emotional "confidante" to his parents. In this role he learned how to be highly attuned to others, how to soothe them, and subsequently his identity was formed as "helper." The role of pastor feels familiar to Tyler and fits like a hand in a glove.

Tyler is motivated to ministry where he might master his past. Of course, God will use Tyler, but his EB begins to point him toward a ministerial vocation. His call came shortly after his conversion in which Tyler experienced affirmation at every stage; college, graduate school and a meteoric rise in churches. Tyler comes from a financially successful family with an entrepreneur father who had high performance expectations and Tyler lived into them. When a child is primarily rewarded for what they *do*, a lingering sense of "what is wrong with me" can develop. They may think, "If I don't perform well, who am I, and how will I be loved?" This secret feeling of shame, is the underside of narcissism. Tyler's EB sets him up that when things got difficult at church, Tyler took it personally, felt shame, and found it hard to regulate his self-esteem. While all pastors are impacted by difficulties, for Tyler, every setback filled him with a crippling sense of shame. This was not how things were supposed to go and he was not ready for it. Struggle could not help but lead to his crippling sense of depression and isolation.

Tyler was, in part, unconsciously drawn to the ministry

because it offered chance to master his past. In a vocation that is always being evaluated and where overwork is rewarded, Tyler would unconsciously hope to learn that his value is not dependent on what he *does* or how hard he works. Growing up in a dysfunctional home like Tyler's, left him feeling fairly powerless. His meteoric rise and the ministry vocation also offered him the chance to feel powerful and idealized, protecting him against shameful self-image. If he had become aware of his motivations for pursuing pastoral ministry, he still would have to deal with the challenges of his assignment, but it might not have hit him so hard, leading him to engage in maladaptive behaviors making everything worse. Knowing himself, he could own his shame instead of defending it through defensiveness and isolation. He could slow down his automatic behaviors and better manage his self-worth and emotions, and take things less personally. Perhaps as he enters therapy, Tyler will be able to know his strengths and weaknesses, developing greater resiliency as he trusts God.

Conclusion

In this paper we have suggested there are conscious and unconscious motivations at play when a person receives a call to full-time ministry. These motivations are not a denial of the divine calling of God on a person's life, but are additional motivations that may draw one toward full-time ministry. We have further suggested that it behooves seminarians who have received a call to "know themselves inside and out," to better understand the call and their personal proclivities and vulnerabilities through personal therapy, growth groups, spiritual direction and practices in order to feel and hear and discern God's voice. By engaging in these means of grace, seminarians and pastors will not only be more resilient when challenges come, but will be better able to respond to these trials with grace for themselves and others.

Formation, Deep and Wide

The Personal and Theological Formation of the Psychotherapist

Stephen W. Simpson

Jennifer's first psychotherapy client ever sat in the waiting room. She breathed slowly into her stomach, as she waited for him to complete the paperwork, trying to slow her increasing heart rate. Every graduate student in psychology gets nervous before seeing their first client, but Jennifer was not nervous; she was afraid.

After her client completed the paperwork, Jennifer led him back to an office to begin their session. She reviewed the information about confidentiality the clinic's policies and procedures, just as she had been taught. She did this perfectly, covering every detail. After she finished, she set the paperwork aside and turned back to the young man sitting across from her.

"So," she began. "What brings you here today?"

The young man sighed. "I lost someone close to me in car accident a few months ago."

Jennifer's hands balled up into fists and her knuckles turned white. "Oh no," she thought, "anything but that."

When Jennifer began her graduate training three months ago, she arrived on campus filled with exuberance and anticipation. Psychology had been her passion ever since she took an "Intro Psych" course as an undergraduate. She could not wait to begin her studies. Most of all, she was eager to begin seeing clients. Jennifer did not know yet if she had a "gift" in this area, but friends had turned to her for help ever since she was fifteen.

And she was almost always able to help. Friends told Jennifer that she made them feel understood. They called her "wise beyond her years." This never made Jennifer over-confident, however; it made her excited to learn more about counseling and psychotherapy. She embraced her studies and excelled in all of her courses during her first semester at graduate school. When school broke for the holidays, she looked forward to returning. Her clinical supervisor would assign her first client when school began again in January.

Three days after she had returned home for Christmas, her twin brother—her best friend—died in a car accident. Funeral arrangements and mourning banished all holiday activities. She spent December in pain and confusion. She lost fifteen pounds in three weeks. She rarely slept and, when she did, she had nightmares. She first became angry with God, then began to wonder if God even existed. Then, despite the protests of her family and friends, she returned to school in January. She refused to abandon the pursuit of her passions even though she did not feel passionate about anything in the wake of her brother's death.

Now her first client had come seeking support and guidance after the death of a loved one. "I can't do this," she thought as her client continued talking. "I need help just as much as he does." She said a silent prayer to the God she once trusted. "Is this some kind of joke? Why would you do this to me? Why would you do this to my client? Are you even real?"

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Few professions are so personal as psychotherapy and counseling. While every profession shifts according to the humanity of those involved, psychotherapy implicates the personal elements of its practitioners in a unique and powerful way. The vocation of psychotherapy requires a formation that is both personal and professional. This applies to clergy providing pastoral counseling, as well. Whereas most professions rely on mastering a specific skill set, research demonstrates that the

personal qualities of the therapist have a significant impact on success in mental health treatment.[1]

Psychotherapy also raises theological issues in a way seldom encountered by other professions. When human beings suffer, questions about God often take center stage. What does God have to do with something like depression, for example. Is it part of God's plan? Does it result from sin? If so, is it individual sin or original sin? Can God make it go away? If not, why not? Does God want people to grow from emotional pain? Is it punishment? Does God have anything to do with it. In my over twenty years of practicing therapy, theological questions big and small swirl around everything from depression to anxiety to addiction to relationship conflict. People of faith see God as connected to their emotional suffering in ways that would not occur to them with other problems, like a toothache or a busted water pipe. This is as true for psychotherapists as it is for their clients. Every time a client wrestles with faith in conjunction with emotional pain, their psychotherapist must confront their own theology in the same issue.

Becoming an effective psychotherapist requires relational and emotional formation. For the Christian therapist, spiritual formation is also paramount. The suffering and human frailty that arise in psychotherapy have deep theological and spiritual implications. The therapist's vocational journey includes a unique combination of intellectual knowledge, technical skill, emotional growth, and spiritual reflection. This chapter examines the personal and theological aspects of that journey.

Personal Formation for a Personal Vocation

A former professor of mine once said, "Your clients can

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[1] American Psychological Association, *Qualities and Actions of Effective Therapists*, with Bruce E. Wampold (Systems of Psychotherapy Video Series; Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2011), DVD.

only become as emotionally healthy and mature as you are." I submit to you that, were this maxim true, the mental health profession would have collapsed decades ago. It is not necessary for psychotherapists to reach some self-actualized ideal of emotional maturity. A shabby, weather-beaten ship can still take passengers to their destination. It just cannot have holes in it. Psychotherapists need not attain perfection in their personal lives, but they require enough emotional, relational, multi-cultural, and spiritual formation to make the vessel stable and seaworthy.

Emotional formation

Gordon Allport, an early pioneer in the Psychology of Religion, aptly described the normal ebb and flow of human emotion:

> Any genuinely human life is psychologically marginal. It is at best a short span of years compressed between two oblivions, spent chiefly in wonderment and terminated in mystery. To be human implies moments of delight and glimpses of happiness; but it also implies ordeals of suffering, discord of purposes, frequent defeat of self, and painful reconquest of self.[2]

Those who practice psychotherapy will experience this process just like everyone else. Allport distinguished, however, "the painful reconquest of self" typical of "any genuinely human life." He says, "A mentally ill person is one who, at least temporarily has lost the battle. He regrets his past, abhors his present, and dreads his future. If we ourselves have not gone over this brink, we have been close enough to it to sympathize with those who have."[3] While a psychotherapist can experience this ordinary "psychologically marginal" existence and remain

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[2] Gordon Allport, "Behavioral Science, Religion, and Mental health," *Journal of Religion and Health* 2.3 (1963): 191.

[3] Allport, "Behavioral Science," 191.

effective, someone who "regrets his past, abhors his present, and dreads his future" will have difficulty helping their clients.

A crucial element of emotional formation for the psychotherapist is recognizing and accepting their own emotional fragility, the psychologically marginal aspect of life. They must understand their emotions and how they impact thoughts and behavior. Any mental health practitioner believing him or herself immune to the impact of human emotion is unfit for the profession. Ignoring the impact of the therapist's emotions on the potential to impact their presents a great liability. I fell into this trap myself, once.

I was a newly licensed psychologist in private practice. One day, between clients, my wife left me a tearful voicemail asking me to call her. My wife and I had been trying to get pregnant, but she had suffered a miscarriage a few weeks earlier. When I called her to find out what was wrong, she told me that she had suffered a second miscarriage. We both mourned as best we could in the few minutes we had on the phone. I felt shaken, but I didn't stop to consider how it would affect my performance as a therapist . . . even though my next client's wife was newly pregnant. And he would surely talk about it. And, oh yeah, he was thinking of divorcing her.

For the next hour, I was not a therapist so much as I was a gruff, surly pundit with a captive audience of one. I was sarcastic and lacked any semblance of empathy. It was one of my worst sessions ever. My client did not get what he needed from me because I regarded myself above the impact of my emotions. I should have known better.

Therapists—both veterans and trainees—can engage in emotional formation in myriad ways, but one trumps them all: Psychotherapists benefit most from getting their own psychotherapy. Psychotherapy for therapists is the *sine qua non* for personal formation. While a therapist benefits from reading, reflection, and other relationships, what Fritz Perls called "the

safe emergency" of psychotherapy is most effective.[4] Understanding the connections of slippery, sometimes hidden, emotions to thoughts and behaviors (and, thus, performance as a therapist), requires close examination from someone who can be empathetic yet objective.

Psychotherapy provides the insight to know whether or not one's emotions will impede their work. Clients come to psychotherapy seeking stability and security. The therapist need not be free of all troubles, but he or she must have enough emotional grounding to provide a steadfast, supportive presence and the clarity of mind to provide empathy and insight. When a therapist cannot provide these things, they must consult with their own therapist. Colleagues, friends, and pastors can also provide support, but the therapist must first call his or her own therapist. Continuing to provide psychotherapy while emotionally compromised is unethical practice, potentially harmful to the client. Emotional formation is crucial for the vocation of psychotherapy, but such formation never occurs in a vacuum.

Relational Formation

All forms of mental health treatment are relational. The degree of relationality varies according to the mode and model of treatment, but psychotherapy (and psychological assessment) involve at least two people relating to each other in some way. Thus, relational formation is crucial for the psychotherapist.

It is tempting to list specific relational qualities necessary for one to practice psychotherapy. Indeed, many have done so.[5]

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[4] Frederick Perls, Ralph F. Hefferline, and Paul Goodman, *Gestalt Therapy: Excitement and Growth in the Human Personality* (Gouldsboro, ME: The Gestalt Journal Press, 1951).

[5] James D. Guy, *The Personal Life of the Psychotherapist* (Grand Rapids: Wiley & Sons, 1987); Jeffrey A. Kottler, *On Being a Therapist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1986] 2017); and Carl R. Rogers, *A*

"Good listener" usually tops the list, with "warmth" at a close second. While I do not disagree, I am going to sidestep specific traits and focus on process and formation. If relational formation succeeds, things like listening and warmth will follow.

We must admit, however, that psychotherapy requires fundamental interpersonal skills. While extroversion it is not necessary (many therapists are introverts), a therapist needs basic communication skills and social awareness. They should pick up on common social cues (while remaining aware that such cues vary according to culture). They need to recognize when someone is upset or uncomfortable, for example. They need good boundaries when it comes to things like physical space and touch. If these things are lacking, the training program should provide remediation, including psychotherapy. If someone is unable to master basic interpersonal skills, a career in psychotherapy will not be a good fit. Assuming the psychotherapist has the requisite personal skills, relational formation requires meeting certain relational needs.

Collegiality/Professional relationships. Psychotherapists need engagement with colleagues. Such engagement can come in the form of a consultant, a supervisor, a mentor, a discussion group, or a professional organization. Working in isolation can narrow therapist's professional focus. They might miss things that a consulting colleague or supervisor will catch. Working in isolation can hamper creativity and professional growth, while consulting with colleagues does the opposite.

The need for collegial contact is not just professional, however. Psychotherapists, especially those who spend many hours a week in session, risk personal isolation. While therapy is a relational enterprise, the relating is uni-directional, with the

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Theory of Therapy, Personality, and Interpersonal Relationships: As Developed in the Client-Centered Framework (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), 3: 184–256.

therapist focusing on the client's needs. This can lead to the neglect of the therapist's relational needs. The process can be insidious because a therapist might not feel isolated after spending all day talking to people. Depression, loneliness, and burnout can sneak up on the therapist who is too busy to engage with colleagues.

If therapists spend most of their time in session every week, they need to develop a community outside his or her office. Setting up a consultation or a reading group or becoming active in (not just joining) a professional organization can provide such community. Before I became a full-time faculty member, I had a private practice and spent most of my hours seeing clients. Teaching adjunct and providing supervision to graduate students provided an outstanding professional community. Therapists need to be around other professionals as part of their personal and vocational formation.

Twinship. D.W. Winnicott described a need for similarity.[6] We need a friend or two who remind us of . . . us. This is not to say that everyone in your community share your traits, interests, background, etc. But we need a friend with whom we have much in common. Psychotherapists work hard to understand myriad different people. They try to see the world from the eyes of clients from different backgrounds and cultures. They try to have empathy for people with disorders that might be bizarre or even frightening. Relating to others in the psychotherapist role requires effort. It is crucial for the therapist to have at least one or two relationships that feel "easy."

Twinship relationships function not only as a relational resting place for the therapist. They also provide what Winnicott called *mirroring.*[7] A good therapist excels in joining clients in their

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[6] D. W. Winnicott, *Winnicott on the Child* (Cambridge: Perseus, 2002).

[7] Winnicott, *Winnicott on the Child.*

thoughts and feelings. They often leave behind their own perspective and way of thinking in order to better understand their clients. The mirroring provided by a twinship relationship provides a home base, to which the therapist can return. The twinship relationship helps the therapist remember and recover who they are. This recovery allows them to provide better mirroring and empathy for their clients when upon returning to the therapy office.

Intimacy. One of the greatest risks to a therapist's professional life is a lack of intimacy in their personal life. It creates the possibility for clinical, ethical, and even legal pitfalls. Learning how to create and maintain intimacy is a crucial aspect of personal formation for the therapist.

Sexual misconduct and other forms of "dual relationship" that violate the boundaries of therapy are a common cause of therapist license suspension. Though the relational nature of therapy can help the client grow in his or her capacity for intimacy, the therapist cannot get his or her intimacy needs meet through clients. A therapist lacking intimacy in their personal life might mistake the appreciation—or even the idealization—received from clients for genuine closeness. It's easy to understand why clients appreciate or idealize their therapists. The uni-directional nature of therapy provides a level of warmth, empathy, attention, and compassion seldom available in other relationships. This can lead the client to place the therapist on the proverbial pedestal. A savvy therapist with fulfilling personal relationships will understand this is as a normal part of the "transference." They also understand that such idealization will diminish over time. A therapist hungry for intimacy, however, might mistake transference for real intimacy. This can lead to anything from bad therapy to serious legal and ethical violations. Everyone needs intimacy, but a lack of intimacy in the personal life of the therapist can lead to professional risks less common in other professions. Unfortunately, graduate training rarely have

emphasized this aspect of formation. The American Psychological Association (APA) does not have a competency benchmark for personal intimacy. Without personal intimacy, however, a therapist's work can suffer.

To be clear, I am not referring to romantic or sexual intimacy alone. Someone can be "single" and still experience intimacy with others. Friendship is a powerful source of intimacy. Henri Nouwen, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Sigmund Freud, Walt Whitman, and Alfred Tennyson all wrote about the intimacy of friendship. But neither does intimacy only mean being "not alone." Someone can have family, friends, and even lovers without experiencing true intimacy. Gayle Timmerman defines intimacy as:

> A quality of a relationship in which the individuals must have reciprocal feelings of trust and emotional closeness toward each other and are able to openly communicate thoughts and feelings with each other. The conditions that must be met for intimacy to occur include reciprocity of trust, emotional closeness, and self-disclosure.[8]

If therapists or therapists-in-training find intimacy difficult, their own personal therapy can be the first step toward seeking reasons and remedies. As with everything discussed here, the therapist need not be "perfect" in this area; understanding intimacy needs and pursuing formation usually suffices as a guard against professional risks.

Diversity formation

A couple of years into my first private practice, over half my caseload consisted of young women who were first or second-generation Korean-Americans. This lasted for about nine months. I have no idea why or how it happened, but I got a crash course

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[8] Gayle M. Timmerman, "A Concept Analysis of Intimacy," *Issues in Mental Health Nursing* 12.1 (1991): 19–30.

in Korean cultural norms. The first thing I noticed was that none of them would call me by my first name, even when encouraged to do so. I also learned that propriety related to sibling birth-order and gender meant a lot more than it did in my family. I discovered that my Korean-American clients saw the world in many ways I did not.

Another time, I made the following offhanded remark to a client who was an African-American woman: "My experience of Pasadena is probably different than yours because I'm a white male." I will never forget her response: "What do you mean 'probably'?"

Culture, race, ethnicity, and so many other factors related to diversity have a tremendous impact on the way someone perceives and experiences life. The therapist that assumes others share his or her worldview does so at great peril. In order to help their clients, therapists have to understand their *weltanschauung* or worldview. More importantly, they need to understand that their view and experience of life is not the same as those of their client. Cultural differences manifest powerfully in psychotherapy and the therapist, at minimum, must be aware that this is happening.

Though diversity impacts the practice of psychotherapy in myriad ways, three, in particular, demonstrate the importance of understanding cultural differences: language, social interactions, and emotional expression.

Language. I once worked with a client newly arrived to the United States from London. She was Caucasian and English was her first language. No problem, right? Wrong.

As we were walking into my office one day, we got a little jammed up going through the door. This is not unusual, especially with new clients. We were trying to read each other about who was waiting on whom to enter the office first and ended up heading into the door at the same time.

"Excuse me!" I said. My client looked at me as if I had just

called her a dirty name. "Sorry," she said, frowning. The awkward moment passed and we went on to do good work together.

Months later, when I related to the story to an American friend who lives in London, he started laughing. "In London," he explained, "'excuse me' means 'get out of my way.' You're supposed to say 'sorry' if you bump into someone." My face flushed. I apologized to my client during our next session and we shared a laugh over the moment.

That was a story of two people who both speak English. Imagine what can happen if the therapist and his or her client grow up speaking different languages. Therapists need not know every particular language difference between them and their clients; rather, they should be aware that those differences exist and require a heightened level of awareness and curiosity.

Social interactions. Diversity issues show up starkly in social interactions—especially in therapy. Some clients expect to shake my hand at the beginning and or end of each session. Sarcasm and humor can represent a resistance to therapy for some clients, while it is culturally normative for others. Some clients insist on calling me Dr. Simpson even after I invite them to call me Steve. The relationship is a primary instrument of understanding in change in psychotherapy. For psychotherapy to work, the therapist must pay attention to culturally different ways of relating between the client and therapist should be understood and accommodated.

Emotional expression. Diversity impacts emotional expression in two primary ways: First, the degree of emotional expression, especially for negative emotions like anger and sadness, vary greatly by culture. Even within one nation, the norms for expressing something like anger can vary greatly. The therapist needs to understand and appreciate this.

Second, and just as important, the therapist needs to understand the cultural dynamics related to emotional

expression. As a therapist (a while male, in my case), how does the client's perception of my cultural identity impact their emotional expression? How safe do they feel? After several months of working with an African-American male, he told me that he had limited his expression of anger because he did not want me to see him as the stereotype of the "angry black man." This was a powerful revelation. My client had many reasons to be angry and I had been wondering why he was not!

Formation for therapists in this area is both professional and personal. Professionally, they need academic coursework on diversity issues and clinical training that exposes them to diverse populations. Personally, they need a deep understanding of how their own cultural backgrounds shape their approach to psychotherapy. They need to understand the assumptions they bring into the therapy room about language, relationships, emotional expression, values, and even standards for mental health. Standards for mental health are not the same for every culture. What a therapist from one culture regards as a standard of health may be very different for a therapist from another culture.

Therapists also need personal exposure to other cultures that extends beyond the classroom and clinical training. They should form relationships with people from different backgrounds. They should travel and learn, if they have the means. They should live somewhere for a little while that makes them feel like "a minority" (even if they really are not one in the larger culture). Personal experience and relationships teach diversity more powerfully than anything else.

Theological Formation for a Spiritual Vocation

The practice of psychotherapy requires theological formation more than most other vocations. As psychology became a distinct discipline over the last century and a half, theological questions, from the ontological to the theodical to the

anthropological, swirled around its development.[9] Before one can heal the mind, one must answer questions about the nature of mind. In order to help someone to "fix" something that is "wrong," requires a basic understanding of right and wrong, good and evil. Before one endeavors to understand human psychology, one must understand their basic assumptions about human nature. All of these questions point back to God. Theology figures prominently in the basic assumptions undergirding psychology and the practice of psychotherapy.

Unfortunately, most practitioners fail to recognize the role of theological assumptions in their work. Pre-conceptions about God and human nature will influence their work, whether it is their own forgotten religious upbringing or the Western norms of modernism. Therapists cannot escape theology whether they are a person of faith or not. The Christian psychotherapist, however, can reflect on their theology as an intentional part of their formation. Reflecting on human nature, sin, and the role of suffering.

Human nature

Human beings are highly evolved animals. Human beings have free will. Human beings do only that which has been pre-determined (by instinct, behavioral reinforcement, the will of God, etc.). Human beings seek purpose and meaning. Human beings are fallen and sinful. Human beings are made in the image of God.

These are just a few statements about the fundamental nature of the person. Whether psychotherapists know it or not, one or more of these assumptions inform their work. These different assumptions, conscious or unconscious, can have massive impact on the practice of psychotherapy.

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[9] Daniel N. Robinson, *An Intellectual History of Psychology* (Madison, MI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).

One therapist, we will call her Jane, grew up in a Calvinist tradition. In high school and college, her instructors espoused and taught a Darwinian view of evolution. Though Jane no longer attends church and she took her last biology class many years ago, she unwittingly developed a deterministic view of human nature.

Our other therapist, John, grew up in a Wesleyan tradition. While at University, John majored in philosophy, becoming fascinated with Christian existentialists such as Kierkegaard and Paul Tillich. John eventually chose Clinical Psychology over Philosophy, but his religious and philosophical roots still affect his work in ways of which he is seldom aware.

A woman named Bella has been suffering from depression and anxiety for several months. She begins interviewing therapists in her area, beginning with Jane and John. While she hears similarities in their insights and suggestions, Bella notes a subtle difference. Jane focuses a bit more on Bella's past, asking about her upbringing and any history of mental illness in her family. John spends more time asking about Bella's current quality of life, such as how she feels about her job and what she does for self-care. Jane frequently references the brain and the role of neurotransmitters. John talks about "mindfulness" and encourages Bella to create a life of meaning and purpose. John and Jane have many of the same recommendations, such as consulting with a psychiatrist and getting more exercise. They both assess for suicidal thoughts. However, Bella can tell, even from the initial interview, that she would have a different experience with each therapist.

The question here is not which therapist would be a better fit for Bella; John and Jane each offer something unique and potentially helpful. The question is whether or not Jane and John understand how their view of human nature informs their work and the extent to which they have reflected on their basic theological assumptions about people. In the worst cases, a therapist might unwittingly shift between different assumptions

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about human nature, employing a hodgepodge of theories and techniques without understanding why.

Therapists have a theology of human nature whether they know it or not. Theological reflection in this area leads to more intentional practice. Definitive answers to questions about human nature can be helpful, but they are not necessary. The therapists need to remain most aware of the assumptions they bring into the room.

Sin and psychopathology

In the 17th century throughout Europe and the colonial United States, hundreds of people, mostly women, were executed for the practice of witchcraft. The *Malleus Maleficarum* or "*Hammer of Witches*" described, in detail, the process of identifying and prosecuting witches. Signs of witchcraft included "temperament toward flux" (i.e., rapid shifts in mood) and being "defective in all the powers of both body and soul" (i.e., physical and emotional frailty).[10]

Fast forward to the late 20th century, when I am sixteen years old and an active member of my church. The first explanations I heard for emotional problems such as anxiety and depression came from the pulpit. I grew up learning that there were two primary causes for emotional and psychological difficulties: sin and lack of faith. And my leaders were not above suggesting that demonic influence might be the culprit.

Every culture has linked sin and psychopathology, in some fashion, in every period of human history.[11] Even secular folklore, past and present, often maintains that emotional problems result from bad choices and moral failings. Philosophy,

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[10] Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Deviance and Moral Boundaries: Witchcraft, the Occult, Science Fiction, Deviant Sciences and Scientists* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 233.

[11] Robinson, *Intellectual History* and Robert Wright, *The Evolution of God: The Origins of Our Beliefs* (New York: Little, Brown, 2010).

theology, and science have all attempted to define the connection between the two.[12] Again, whether they know it or not, psychotherapists bring assumptions with them about the relationship between sin and psychopathology.

Exploring this relationship is beyond the scope of this chapter, but theories about the impact of sin on mental health tend to fall broadly under the headings of "original sin" versus "willful sin." The "original sin" position posits that mental illness, like physical illness, results from the fall. Creation is broken and mental illness is more evidence of sin's universal corruption. On the "willful sin" side, emotional problems result from sinful choices. The most common example of this is choosing instant gratification over self-discipline. Of course, "original sin" and "willful sin" explanations of psychopathology are not mutually exclusive, but most of us grow up learning to favor one explanation.

Let us go back to our two therapists, Jane and John, and our client, Bella. Jane tends toward an "original sin" position. With Jane, Bella gets the sense that her anxiety and depression were unavoidable based on her family background and biology. Jane's treatment focuses on insight and medication. John, on the other hand, implies that Bella has more control over her emotional states. He talks to her about the choices she makes and gives her "homework" aimed at actively improving her quality of life. Neither John nor Jane have explicit awareness of their theologies about psychopathology, but it shows up in their work nonetheless.

The above is a bit of an oversimplification. Most therapists, consciously or unconsciously, maintain a balanced understanding about the roles of "original sin" versus "willful sin." Again, the

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[12] For evidence of clumsy scientific attempts, see Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man* (tr. Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter; Durham, NC: Duke University Press, [1876] 2006).

goal need not be an articulated explanation of the relationship between sin and psychopathology, but, rather, an awareness of one's own assumptions and biases.

Suffering

During my first year as a student in The Graduate School of Psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary, I took a class titled "Christianity and Psychology." The course was taught by the Chair of Integration at the time, Lewis Smedes. He was the only theologian in the history of the school to hold the Chair. All other Chairs have been psychologists.

At the beginning of the first class, Lew walked in a few minutes late. He sat on a stool in front of the class and assumed the posture of Rodin's *The Thinker*. After remaining silent for a moment, he sighed and said, "I have been a Christian for almost seventy years. I have been studying theology for over fifty years. And of all the questions I still can't answer, the biggest one is 'Where the hell is God when you need Him?'"[13]

Theological formation around suffering extends beyond the therapists' intellectual assumptions to their own experiences of suffering. At some point in their journey, every person of faith experiences suffering that raises questions, and often doubts, about God's role in their suffering. In *Lament for a Son* Nicholas Wolterstorff says,

> How is faith to endure, O God, when you allow all this scraping and tearing on us? You have allowed rivers of blood to flow, mountains of suffering to pile up, sobs to become humanity's song--all without lifting a finger that we could see. You have allowed bonds of love beyond number to be painfully snapped. If you have not abandoned us, explain yourself.[14]

[13] Lewis Smedes, personal communication to Simpson, January 1994.

[14] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids:

Therapists' theological formation around suffering is the most personal, and also, perhaps, the most important to their vocations. A theology of suffering implicates the experience and narrative of one's own suffering. Simultaneously, everything about the vocation of the psychotherapists focuses on the suffering of their clients. Without suffering, the vocation of psychotherapy would not even exist. There is an intimate connection between therapists' theologies of suffering and their work as psychotherapists.

Formation in this area is messy but essential. Theological beliefs—sometimes ones that are less-than-Biblical—swirl around with painful personal experiences, creating a cauldron of intense thoughts and feelings. To paraphrase J. R. R. Tolkien, the therapist cannot "dip in the ladle quite blindly" and serve their own unformed thoughts, feelings, and experiences to their clients. Neglecting formation in this area stunts personal and professional growth while potentially damaging the therapeutic process. While there is no neat, linear path toward formation in this area, three elements are essential: personal psychotherapy, theological study, and spiritual practice.

Therapists will never reach their full potentials unless they receive their own psychotherapy. They need to know what it is like to be a client expected to trust the therapist sitting across from them. They need to identify their own emotional blind spots and understand how their familial and cultural background and inform their perceptions. Psychotherapy is also essential for exploring their own experiences of suffering and their questions about God's relationship to that suffering. Therapy provides a safe, sacred place where someone can ask difficult questions. As their defenses loosen, they will confront frightening feelings and awful doubts about God's goodness and love. Only in psychotherapy can such deep work take place.

A thorough formation around the theology of suffering

Eerdmans, 1987), 52.

requires studying how others have confronted the problem. Men and women of faith have wrestled with the question of God's role in suffering throughout the history of the Christian faith. The therapist seeking wisdom in this has abundant resources: Job, The Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, the Gospels, Paul's epistles, Augustine, Hildegard of Bingen, St. Teresa of Avila, Kierkegaard, C.S. Lewis, Henri Nouwen, Phillip Yancey. More books than anyone could read in a lifetime address the troubling juxtaposition between an all-loving, all-power God and a world in constant pain.

While therapy and theological study are necessary for the forming therapist, they are not sufficient on their own. The forming therapist must bring their pain and confusion before God. Like Job, they must cry out to God and ask why people suffer. And, like Job, they must listen to God's response. This requires spiritual discipline and practice. The methods and structure of the practice matter less than the consistency. The therapist must come before God again and again. The forming therapist may never arrive at a satisfying answer to the question of God's role in human suffering. I know I have not. Over time, however, the therapist will come to understand a fundamental truth to the vocation of psychotherapy: God never wants us to suffer alone.

Tolkien described human beings as "sub-creators" making "by the law in which we're made . . . in the image and likeness of a Maker."[15] A key sub-creative task for the therapist is ensuring that people do not suffer alone. This requires more than just passive listening. The therapist must aspire to walk with a client through his or her suffering the way that God walks with us. As Wolterstorff says, "We're in it together, God and we, together in the history of our world. The history of our world is the history of

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[15] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Leaf by Niggle* (New York: HarperCollins, [1947] 2016), 24.

our suffering together."[16] This requires that therapists allow God to meet them in their own suffering. They need to feel the sustaining power of God's presence even when God does not provide answers to their most desperate questions. They must feel the healing power of God's love even when God does not immediately remove suffering. They must allow God to walk with them through darkness and tragedy. Only after this can therapists know what it means to be powerfully present for their client when answers and remedies do not come quickly or easily, the therapist can be powerfully present with their client. This forms the vocation of the psychotherapist into something sacred.

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[16] Wolterstorff, *Lament*, 91.

The Instructor's Role in Forming Cultural Sensitivity

An Exploration of a Classroom Activity

Tina Houston-Armstrong

In today's increasingly diverse society it is imperative that those in helping professions be consciously aware of how their own identity and cultural background influences the ways in which they interact with and respond to others. Social location, gender, ethnicity, faith tradition and additional personal identity factors influence the ways in which individuals live in and view the world around them. Assisting individual learners in becoming increasingly aware of their personal biases, social identities, and differences requires an intentional process and explicit focus on the development of "self and other awareness." While most individuals are familiar with the concept of self-awareness or having a personal conscious understanding, the notion of other-awareness is less common but equally relevant to developing empathy for those that hold diverse perspectives. Other-awareness, or the ability to appreciate the unique differences of others, is a fundamental building block of developing cultural sensitivity.

Without self-awareness and other-awareness, good intentions can quickly backfire and become a source of oppression and harm. Derald Wing Sue and David Sue highlight the danger of not attending to the personal work of self-understanding, especially for those whose vocation includes caring for diverse populations. They note that helping professionals "have done great harm to culturally diverse groups by invalidating their life experience, by defining their cultural values or differences as

deviant and pathological, by denying them culturally appropriate care, and by imposing the values of the dominate culture upon them."[1] Though it is likely that most individuals who pursue a career in human services do so with altruistic and genuine motivations to serve others, these good intentions are not enough. Being unaware of the unique factors that shape internal and external perceptions and interactions poses significant negative consequences for the helper and most assuredly for the help seeker; because of these dangers, intentional forming processes are essential.

One method for guiding students on this journey of self-discovery involves providing an opportunity for them to witness what such a practice looks like. In forming culturally aware students, I have found it helpful as an instructor to share my ongoing pursuit of cultural competence. Taking an honest look at patterns of behavior, barriers, traditions, and mindsets that shape my view of difference has been an invaluable teaching tool. This chapter is written with the instructor in mind. In this chapter, I will provide an overview of a signature course assignment and will share how I also complete the assignment as an invitation to students to witness my process towards becoming more cultural sensitivity and self-aware. I offer this not as a pinnacle example of having arrived but as a glimpse of being on the journey. Sharing personal vulnerabilities, joys, mistakes, questions, and self-learning can be extremely instrumental to the students' learning process. To assist instructors who may want to replicate a similar assignment, I will provide an overview of the course and assignment, review some relevant theoretical considerations in facilitating this assignment and teaching such a course, detail how I model the assignment, and close with some final thoughts.

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[1] Derald Wing Sue and David Sue, *Counseling the Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice* (New York: Wiley, 2003), 8.

Overview of the Course and Assignment

The Touchstone in Theology & Psychology course (hereafter referred to as Touchstone) is a unique class that takes place in a doctoral psychology program that is embedded in a seminary. Across training levels, these future health service professionals are expected to display a capacity to comprehend how their own cultural history, attitudes, and beliefs impact and shape their understanding of self and the experience of others. Achieving this threshold requires students to "demonstrate knowledge, awareness, sensitivity, and skills when working with diverse individuals and communities who embody a variety of cultural and personal background and characteristics."[2] As a first step towards achieving this goal, the Touchstone course is offered to students during their first term, in their first year of study. The placement of this course is significant and signals to students the importance of this work. This course asks emerging professionals to consider how their faith is contextualized and shaped by factors of their own individual diversity. This class serves as an entry point in forming cultural competent professionals.

In this ten-week course, students are exposed to various topics of diversity with an overarching goal of engaging students in self-reflective practices to gain insight into how their own personal and cultural history, attitudes and biases affect their understanding of who they are and the traditions they inherited. Both experiential and didactic exercises are used in this course and are designed to encourage the evolving process of cultivating an objective stance. By the end of the course students will develop tools and a process for ongoing self-exploration increasingly to understand themselves their self while being more accepting of

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[2] American Psychological Association, *Multicultural Guidelines: An Ecological Approach to Context, Identity, and Intersectionality* (August 2017): http://www.apa.org/about/policy/multicultural-guidelines .pdf (accessed 12/12/19).

others' cultural differences. Additionally, a primary objective of this course is to offer students a space to explore their own theological traditions and how those traditions impact their outlook. This is particularly relevant in a doctoral program that trains students to become "integrators," those who explicitly and implicitly explore how their theology impacts their psychology and how their psychology impacts their theology.

This course seeks to move students toward personal integration by reflecting upon their cultural narrative. Though all graduate psychology programs offer students occasions to examine aspects of personal diversity, it is uncommon for these institutions to include opportunities for the exploration of one's faith tradition as an integral factor to be considered. Just as it is essential to explore the various cultural traditions that impact an individual's narrative, it is equally necessary to examine the multiple perspectives and inheritances passed on by one's Christian traditions.[3] All theological traditions have inheritances (rituals, customs, practices, and belief structures) that inform a particular lens through which the world is observed and by which inferences on other components of culture (i.e. race, ethnicity, gender, ability, sexual orientation etc.) are constructed. Becoming conscious of these inheritances is an essential first step in developing self-awareness and cultural sensitivity.

The symbol & artifact assignment

Though this chapter focuses on the in-class cultural Symbol & Artifact assignment, it should be mentioned that there are other assignments that support the students' ability to complete this activity at an in-depth level. For example, students are required to complete personal reflection assignments to six

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[3] Brad D. Strawn, Ronald W. Wright, and Paul Jones, "Tradition-Based Integration: Illuminating the Stories and Practices that Shape our Integrative Imagination," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 33.4 (2014): 300–10.

independent self-assessments inviting them to think deeply about their own socialization with regards to multicultural issues. The self-assessments consist of open ended questions that serve as springboards to consider areas such as the experience of difference, gender identity, power and privilege, racial and ethnic identity, and a final self-evaluation on the topic of openness and learning from the course. These assessments were developed by Dr. Krystel Edmonds-Biglow and adapted with her permission. While the students are not required to address every question on the assessment, they are encouraged to find an area to explore at a deep level. In addition to the assessments, students engage class readings that offer narratives of theological exploration from culturally diverse and non-dominant perspectives, serving as a backdrop in which students grapple with locating their voices and traditions. Students also participate in a weekly process-oriented small group of between five and seven members, led by advanced doctoral students, that allows more in-depth process. It is in this context that students are asked during the second week of class to sign up for an in-class presentation in which they explore symbols or artifacts that represent their cultural context and faith tradition. Students are not expected to start presenting until the third week of class to ensure adequate time to forge a cohesive learning environment. Given that students come in to the class with varying levels of cultural awareness, it is helpful to allow students that have demonstrated advanced proficiency to present first. Also, I suggest limiting the presentations to no more than two students per class session to allow for more thoughtful engagement and to reduce fatigue. Physical and emotional exhaustion is a common byproduct of asking students to sit with and openly hold perspectives different from self; therefore, careful monitoring and pacing is strongly suggested.

      With this assignment, students have the flexibility to bring in any item(s) that they deem representative of their heritage. Common items include photos, family heirloom, pieces of art,

food, or any other tangible artifact that can serve as a point of departure for reflecting on the student's cultural context and inherited faith tradition. Students are given approximately seven to ten minutes to share the symbolism of what their artifact embodies and/or how it represents their cultural context. Students are also presented with the task of making links between their inheritance and their current context. After the presentation is concluded, the presenter is given an additional seven to ten minutes for their classmates to ask questions (for a total of approximately fifteen to twenty minutes). Embedded in the assignment is the opportunity for learners to practice cultural humility as the starting point for reflection. The audience members are expected to reflect on and have dialogue with the material that is being presented.

For the students listening to the presentation, this assignment provides an opportunity to learn about differences and to have their assumptions and beliefs challenged. Listening to multiple personal stories that provide counter narratives regarding various dimensions of diversity and faith traditions provides legitimacy to non-mainstream narratives and raises questions about the "stock stories" that are held up as status quo experiences.[4] Contrary to popular belief, there is no "generic" Christian tradition to which all believers ascribe. There are ways that the particularity of our faith and culture intersect to shape one's understanding. This assignment allows for the re-centering of narratives held by individuals living on the margins of dominant culture. This assignment causes students and faculty to become aware of the narratives that they fundamentally hold as truth and to reflect on how it came to be so. It also provides an

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[4] Lee Anne Bell, "Theoretical Foundations for Social Justice Education," *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice* (eds. Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin; 3rd ed.; New York: Routledge, 2016), 4–26.

opportunity for self-discovery, as students make connections between their inheritance and their current practices, behaviors, and attitudes. There are key considerations that are necessary in both practice and facilitation to support students' process in understanding these connections.

Relevant Theoretical Considerations for Diversity Education

Cultural competence & embracing difference: A word about exploring cultural "difference"

Historically, difference has been looked down upon, rejected, and "othered." This course and assignment seeks to help students explore and embrace cultural difference as something to be appreciated and honored. An assumption of this exercise is that in being able to articulate and embrace the difference that is within self, it will become easier to embrace the difference that is a part of others. Active participation in diverse communities provides exposure to a multiplicity of narratives and ways of being in the world. Though it is unrealistic to believe that any one person could understand the nuances of every culture they encounter, there are principles that can be learned that allow for greater appreciation, growth, and *formation* in relation to embracing difference and becoming culturally sensitive. Embracing difference is an ongoing and lifetime journey which requires sustained self-reflection and engagement within diverse communities.[5] Becoming culturally sensitive involves both an individual and communal formation process. This complex and multifaceted approach provides the individual an opportunity meaningfully to interact with the difference of self, the differences of others, receive feedback, and ask questions, all while being

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[5] Evelyn Bussema and Pat Nemec, "Training to Increase Cultural Competence," *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal* 30.1 (Summer 2006): 71–73.

attentive to one's own processes and behaviors. The intricacies of embracing difference require active dialogue and interaction with multiple perspectives, in a safe-learning environment.

Cultural competence as a starting point

The most common developmental model of cultural competence is a tiered model that includes self-*awareness*, *knowledge*, and *skills*. In this model, each of the domains builds on one other in an interactive framework. It is important that learners grasp the concepts and become actively involved with the goal of ongoing exploration of their own attitudes and biases. Given that students start at varying places on this journey, it is important to have a few weeks of didactic lectures accompanied by readings to ensure that a firm baseline is established. This baseline will bolster the ability for all students to be adequately equipped to engage in this conversation, hence beginning the process of *awareness.* Awareness is the critical first step where learners become conscious of their own heritage while exploring how this influences their beliefs, assumptions, values, and practices. At this juncture it is important to assist the learner in identifying how their own cultural traditions influence their psychological processes. Becoming self-aware is essential in this phase as it supports the student in being open to identifying cultural differences. The active participation of both the students and the instructor is warranted in this process-oriented course. It is imperative that the instructor discloses ways in which they too are actively becoming more self-aware, or – at a minimum – provide past examples of insight developed by engaging this process, as a means of providing a modeling awareness to students.

The second tier of developing cultural competence, *knowledge*, hinges on the accumulation of information about one's own cultural group and that of others. Knowledge provides an opportunity for individuals to be exposed to content that helps them to understand the individual, cultural, and systemic factors

that impact various groups. Such content and knowledge often includes an exploration of the impact of discrimination and cultivates an understanding of diverse racial, cultural, and ethnic minority groups. The final tier, *skills*, focuses on training and educational opportunities that further hone the learner's capacity effectively to engage individual and cultural diversity. While all aspects of this model are important, the ten-week Touchstone class focuses primarily on self-awareness, with other components being targeted in subsequent courses.

Cultural humility

Though cultural competence provides a necessary starting point in systematizing the importance of training related to diversity, the process of developing cultural humility takes diversity education a step further. Cultural humility proposes a culturally sensitive stance that emphasizes a posture of willingness and openness to learn from the client.[6] This model seeks to shift power and expertise to elevate the importance of what the client brings into the room. Embracing such a perspective allows for both the therapist and the client to grow and develop.[7] When the experience of the other is met with skepticism, criticism, or even indifference, the opportunity for growth and healing can be stunted. Cultural humility recognizes the experiences that the client brings into the session as essential and valuable. Cultural humility also calls into question the systemic and institutional barriers that maintain power imbalances and encourages the therapist to take action in speaking into systemic injustices. In the classroom context, the

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[6] Marcie Fisher-Borne, Jessie Montana Cain, and Suzanne L. Martin, "From Master to Accountability: Cultural Humility as an Alternative to Cultural Competence," *Social Work Education* 34.2 (March 2015): 165–81.

[7] Tina Armstrong, "Considerations in Culturally Modifying Psychotherapy," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* (forthcoming).

student who presents a story is seen as an expert on his or her own story, and the audience becomes the curious learner. Audience members are afforded the opportunity to become aware of their own privilege and how they may or may not support systems that are oppressive to others. Here the instructor becomes instrumental in affirming and empowering the student and his or her contribution to the learning context.

Cultivating empathy

Meta-analyses on empathy have noted that this construct is central to supporting positive changes in the client.[8] The person-centered therapy approach highlights three fundamental attributes that a therapist must display to support an optimal atmosphere for the growth of the client. In creating such an environment the therapist offers a space where the client is able to move towards becoming their true self via self-awareness and self-exploration. In efforts to create such an atmosphere the therapist must offer genuineness, acceptance, and empathy, through which the therapist displays the ability to understand and deeply grasp the internal and subjective world of the other person. The therapist is not simply parroting back the content but stays attuned to the client's experience. The classroom provides a great opportunity to assist students with developing these attributes. This particular classroom assignment allows students to display empathy towards one another as they listen to various narratives. More specifically, this exercise allows for the group to hear different narratives and interact with these narratives with a

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[8] Arthur C. Bohart et al., "Empathy," *Psychotherapy Relationships That Work: Therapist Contributions and Responsiveness to Patients* (ed. John C. Norcross; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 89–108; Robert Elliott et al., "Empathy," *Psychotherapy Relationships That Work* (ed. John C. Norcross; 2nd ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 132–52; and Robert Elliot et al., "Therapist Empathy and Client Outcome: An Updated Meta-Analysis," *Psychotherapy* 55.4 (2018): 399–410.

curious learning posture that is supported by the foundation of empathy. Empathy offers the opportunity for connections and relationships to be formed. The instructor can further enhance the development of such an environment by modeling empathetic responsiveness.

Vulnerability & pushing beyond social norms

Engaging in this course and most specifically this activity requires a degree of risk and vulnerability. It can be taboo for some to participate in conversations that explore difference. This seems to be even more challenging for students from traditions that have not offered spaces to practice these conversations. The discussion of race, ethnicity, and gender in heterogeneous public spaces is a rare dialogue for many congregations and individuals. Students have offered feedback that these topics are typically discussed in small homogenous groups, with likeminded individuals, where the conversation appears "safer." Students note difficulty in discussing topics that contend with overdeveloped mainstream narratives. In class, they are asked to struggle authentically with messages that might push beyond the social norms that they hold. Students and instructors alike do not want to be misunderstood or, for that matter, do not want to harm others; therefore, it is necessary to devise boundaries and guidelines for these difficult dialogues. Though it does not take away all social taboos and social awkwardness, having the instructor participate in this activity and then process their feelings related to the exercise is a step in the right direction. Being able to model for students how to have these "courageous" conversations helps to set a tone of openness.

Creating a safe learning environment

During the first class session, right after the review of the syllabus, it is important to discuss the range of experiences that occur within the course, anchored by the course rationale. This

should be immediately followed by an instructor-guided discussion on establishing ground rules for how to contribute in the class. Creating a safe learning environment does not mean that students will not be challenged or uncomfortable at times, but it does mean that they will be confronted in a thoughtful and respectful manner. On the first day of their doctoral experience, students are just encountering each other, so steps to foster a respectful environment will be an essential task moving forward. Because this is the first process-oriented course in the learner's graduate program, the instructor will have to take steps to hold boundaries by having open discussion with the class when any incidents occur.

Modeling difference: use of co-instructors

Co-teaching is distinguished from team teaching, as co-teaching involves a collaborative effort in each component and session of the course.[9] For this course, the co-instructor model enhances the students' learning experience by offering differences in faith tradition and culture, and by bringing complex identities in conversation with each other. Co-facilitation is a recommended practice while teaching on topics related to diversity as the pairing of a member from a majority and marginalized group can enrich the content and learning experience.[10] I, an African American woman who holds a PhD in clinical psychology and has deep roots in a predominately African American denomination, co-teach with a white American male, who holds a PhD in theology and has a Southern Baptist heritage. This opportunity to offer similar and divergent view points from different contexts provides students the opportunity to experience difference in the

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[9] Pat Griffin and Matthew L. Ouellett, "Facilitating Social Justice Courses," *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice* (eds. Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin; 2nd ed.; New York: Routledge, 2016), 89–113.

[10] Griffin and Ouellett, "Facilitating Social Justice Courses."

room. It also provides a chance for students to learn from our interactions on topics of race, ethnicity, gender, and ability. There have been times where it has been more impactful for my co-instructor to speak on a given topic based on his lived experience. Likewise there are ways in which my lived experiences can better illuminate a given topic. The co-instructor model can be more time intensive for faculty given the necessity of coordinating and checking in, yet it can be richly rewarding for the learners.

Modeling the Experience

This course requires the co-instructors to participate actively in the class process, including completing the Symbols & Artifacts exercise. Modeling this assignment gives students a visual of what it looks like to be vulnerable and to self-disclose while sharing their personal narrative. For students who have not participated in prior process-oriented courses, this is a very new dynamic that carries a host of feelings. The example set by the instructors' modeling of the assignment and providing commentary about how they are feeling about the presentation gives space for students to own and sit with the various emotions that come up for them as well. Given that this course is sequenced in the first year and within the first term, there is a considerable amount of anxiety that students often have. Students are concerned about how others will view them, especially when they have not had time to develop bonds with their new cohort peers. In addition to openly naming this and discussing it, having the professors authentically share appears to dampen some of the fears associated with the act of revealing parts of self.

My Approach to Revealing: Using the Symbols & Artifacts

I will detail how I set up this activity as I believe it is very crucial to be intentional, as the students will take cues from the instructor on how they, too, will put their presentations together. As I prepare to set up, I honestly reflect on how anxious I am in

preparing to share my story. I talk about it in terms of a fear of how people will perceive me or what meaning will be attached to my narrative. Questions concerning if I will be understood or misunderstood are discussed. This is a common concern that I hear from students and with which I can genuinely resonate. As I stand in front of the classroom, I slowly start to unpack my artifacts. First, I take out a brightly colored tablecloth and I drape it over the small table. I then pull out the first picture, that of my paternal great-great grandmother and great-grandmother standing side by side. In silence, I set it on the table. Next, I take out a picture of my maternal great-grandparents and their thirteen children, including my grandmother in her late teens. I gently rub it on my shirt to clear away the dust and set it down. Next to that, I set up a picture of my mom, my three siblings, and me running around our family's Mississippi homestead and church. I then pull out a freshly picked collard green leaf from my garden and a dried bunch of raw cotton from near my mother's home. I carefully place all these items on the tablecloth, paying close attention to where I set them down and acknowledging each item as a treasure. I sit down, take a deep breath, and start my story.

My story in brief

I locate myself racially, ethnically, and in terms of gender, and go on to pay homage to my ancestors in the pictures. I take the time to mention their names and to honor their journey and the legacy that they passed on to me. I discuss how I come from a line of educators, those who formally and informally were in the role of facilitating learning and nurturing the growth and development of others. I acknowledge that I was also gifted with a green thumb and have a love for tending to the growth and development of people and things. I make the connection that I am a descendent of those who made their livelihood from tending and caring for the fields. I also acknowledge my deep family ties

to the Black Church, and the role of leading others in songs of worship that many generations of my family have participated. After setting the stage in the more global aspects of my inheritance, I begin to discuss some of the more complex and vulnerable components of my story.

Leading students in the exploration of "self" means that the facilitator needs to have done some of their own internal work and are comfortable with sharing relevant parts this journey with students. While most students in the School of Psychology have had an opportunity to reflect on some aspects of their social identity, I have found that they typically have not done the same level of reflection on their faith tradition and/or inheritance; therefore, I like to spend a significant aspect of my story at this juncture.

In reflecting on my faith tradition, I highlight the influences of my mother's Baptist tradition and my father's African Methodist Episcopal (AME) tradition. In my earliest memories, I recall going to both churches every Sunday. However around age five or six, there was a distinct point in time when we no longer attended both services and only affiliated with the AME church that was within walking distance from my home. I go on to describe the differences between the two church experiences and the things that I enjoyed and or missed by only attending the AME church. At the AME church there were more children my age and the kids actively participated in the church service, be it in the choir, reading the morning scripture, or helping to collect the offering. I share that it was not until I became a teenager that I found out why my family no longer attended both churches. Apparently, my mom decided to attend the AME Church exclusively because that was the church and denomination that my dad was affiliated with and it was located in our community. This decision revealed my father's personal theological and doctrinal convictions as well as my mother's core values, the importance of my family worshipping together and being active

participants in our local community. Attendance and membership at the AME church fulfilled both.

Making the connection

After presenting my story, I begin to make the connection to how my past traditions have impacted who I am today. I discuss how growing up in the AME church shaped my understanding and expectation for what membership in a spiritual community looked like. For me it meant exposure to strong doctrinal convictions, where church family was very much a part of my extended family, participation in social justice activism was routine, an offering of robust and rhythmic singing of songs and lifting of hands in worship was common, and fellowship around delicious communal meals was obligatory. As I reflect on my religious and cultural heritage, I highlight that for the majority of my life I have continued to participate in African American congregations where my racial identity and faith tradition have intersected.

After highlighting my past traditions, I juxtapose it with my current church context. Though the church I currently attend is a significant departure from the faith tradition I inherited, on another level it is deeply reflective of two important values passed down by my family of origin. In the past year my family and I have become members of a predominately white conservative evangelical congregation that is a three minute drive from my home. Initially, I believed that consenting to this move and being the only African American family in our church was largely driven by my husband's theological and doctrinal convictions and tradition. In preparing for the Symbol & Artifacts presentation, however, I have become more consciously aware of how this move reflects a decision my mother made decades earlier. My mother chose to embrace my dad's faith tradition based on her values of having our family worship together and being integrally connected in our local community. Similarly, I too have

prioritized my family worshipping together and doing so in our local community. Sitting with tensions of this decision is a part of the experience I openly share with students.

Q & A

After presenting my story for seven to ten minutes, I stop and briefly (one to two minutes) share authentically about the experience of presenting this information to the class. I acknowledge how uncomfortable it is to share parts of my story. I admit that I still find it uncomfortable to share vulnerably, but have the benefit of experience to trust this process. I then open it up for questions. Students are typically reluctant to ask questions; therefore, another advantage of having a co-instructor is to model asking questions from a position of cultural humility. The instructors have one to two questions ready that they will ask of each other and every student participant, to prime the conversation. Typically after the third or so presentation the students' need less priming to ask questions of the presenters. The Q & A discussion is a reciprocal learning process; it allows for the audience to gain more insight while helping the presenter to also gain greater understanding and articulate points of connection and/or dissonance. During the following class, the second co-instructor presents his story in a similar manner, but unique to his culture and faith tradition. Carefully crafting this assignment allows for not only individual formation but for the larger class community as well.

Final Thoughts

In the training of individuals who are pursuing an educational calling for the benefit of being equipped to serve others, it is not enough for instructors to attend only to their academic training. It is also critical to focus on their cultural sensitivity formation. Forming students who can attune to and hold the diverse parts of their being and that of others in a

nonjudgmental and accepting manner is the foundation for moving towards cultural competence. Engaging in this work requires vulnerability, authenticity, and humility. This work is often challenging and complex, yet it is central to the mission of forming students who embrace difference and ultimately develop awareness and empathy. Facilitating this level of knowledge and depth of insight demands the active and transparent participation of the instructor(s). Having an instructor authentically model this journey adds to the value of the learning experience. The current literature suggests that one of the most effective developmental models in learning cultural competence begins with self-awareness. Becoming self-aware is done best in relationship with others. It is critical for those who provide human services to be aware of how they view the world and how this impacts their practice.

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