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'Lord, Teach us to Pray'

The Seminary as a School for Prayer

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Bishop Olav Skjevesland's sixty-fifth birthday provides a rich opportunity for exploring the relationship of theological education and the church's ministry. Who better symbolizes the convergence of seminary and ministry than a man who has given significant portions of his life to both and has experienced their joys and frustrations? My conversations with him and other church leaders, academics, and theological students in the Scandinavian countries convince me that we share many of the same dissatisfactions with the troubled marriage of academia and ecclesia. I am also confident that we share a common hope in the integrity and future of that relationship.

Seminary and Church

Despite efforts to secure a closer bond between the church and its theological institutions, fundamental questions about the role of the seminary and the nature of the ministry remain. The church is not immune to society's shifting estimates of the minister's role in our culture. How are we to talk about the relationship of school and church when there is so little agreement on the essential nature of each?

Not long ago a friend of mine was installed as «executive priest» in his Episcopal congregation. His title captures the tension, not to say the confusion, between two conceptions of the minister: that of the credentialed professional and that of the priestly intercessor. I suspect our notion of the minister will dictate our preference for the sort of schools we want to train them.

And what is a seminary? Is it a cloistered world apart in which students are steeped in prayer and holiness? Is it a professional school of the university that takes its place beside the law school and medical school (with lower salaries for its professors, of course)? Or is it a graduate school of religion whose students will find creative ways of engaging the major issues in our culture, albeit with an academic degree our culture finds incomprehensible? Does the seminary belong to the national church as the brick-and-mortar embodiment of its theology? Or does it serve the special needs of a geographical region?

It is hard to know the answers to these questions. But I do know that seminary and ministry belong together. I do know from my own experience and the witness of the church that the Holy Spirit means for them to be together and moves through them both to call, gather, enlighten, and sanctify the whole catholic church on earth.

Just *how* the Spirit means for them to be together is the subject of discussion and, sometimes, mutual distrust.

The Perennial Tension

The tension between an established clergy-class and the laity extends as far back as the dis-

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parity between monastic ideals and the secular realities they criticized. Luther and Schleiermacher, each in his own way, attempted to bridge the gap between priestly knowledge and the faith of ordinary people. Schleiermacher succeeded only in sharpening the distinction within his own theological system and in his own personal vocation. His system is both rigorously *wissenschaftlich* and an exercise of affective sensibility. His theology presents itself as a microcosm of the tension, as does his career: he was a renowned theologian and the most prominent Reformed pastor in Berlin. As we shall note below, the more recent trend toward professionalism in ministry has done little to reduce the distance between seminary-trained clergy and the laity.

Among many contemporary churches the congregation's distrust of seminary training is taken for granted. Young people departing for seminary are often cautioned not to lose their faith in seminary. «Don't let them take out of you what God has put into you,» they are told.

At seminary, the same students are given to understand that the people «out there» in the church can't possibly appreciate a good theological argument. They are naïve when it comes to important theological issues. So it is that the seminarian encounters his or her first potential enemy in an unlikely place, in the reimagined portrait of his or her home congregation.

The stereotypes reflect the tension that exists between the two forms of God's mission. Each is based on an erroneous assumption. The people «out there» in the church apparently believe in some pre-theological state of innocence. They seem to think that if we can avoid the critical questions, we can remain pure. The seminary, on the other hand, often fails to appreciate the theological dimensions of the congregation's ordinary activities. Its curriculum often ignores or condescends to the theological/cultural issues the new graduate will first encounter in ministry: questions of abortion, evolution, racism, immigration–issues most educated people consider settled, but which in many communities represent genuine problems.

The tension between congregation and seminary is inevitable and it is not all bad. In mysterious ways the seminary and the congregation embody the whole church–yet with different functions. The seminary engages the panorama of the church's teaching, life, and practices, and places it into a conceptual framework that is foreign to most Christians. Everything it teaches finds its place on a larger canvass of ideas and events. It often divides the church's message into biblical, historical, systematic, and practical categories and, magically, makes it all fit into two fourteen-week semesters.

Life in a congregation isn't that neat. The seminary categories are real and useful but often mixed-up beyond recognition in the pressure cooker of a congregation. A pastoral call in a hospital or a wedding ceremony or a building program may become occasions for profound theology. I once heard a pastor say as he was leaving the room of a terminally ill, unchurched woman, «Remember, our question for next time is, 'How do I know I am a child of God?'» And she said, «Right, see you Thursday.» In some curricula there are social-scientific protocols, even stages, one must honor in the treatment of a dying person. Catechesis usually isn't one of them. Compared to a seminary, a congregation is messy, and the sort of knowledge it requires is of a different order. In seminary the student may learn how to define practical wisdom; in the church the minister must practice it from the first day.

The church's criticism of the seminary often amounts to the accusation that the seminary isn't *like* us. That is, it is not a congregation. This is true. A congregation's reason for existing is to worship the triune God. A school's reason for existence is to learn about the triune God. We recently celebrated All Saints (in November 2006). A congregation *aches* for its saints as brothers and sisters and sons and daughters; a seminary remembers the saints as historical figures. Even in a free-standing (as opposed to university-based) seminary, students are not bound to a cultic heart with the same intensity of devotion and mutual responsibility as are members of a congregation. Each has a different heartbeat.

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The seminary enjoys a distinct advantage in *not* being a congregation. There are two ways to learn: one is to step *into* a phenomenon and experience it. One learns to water ski by going out to the lake, putting on the skis, and being dragged through the water. The second way to learn is to step *back* from the phenomenon in order to gain perspective, the way a painter must step back to assess the work or a writer must put the short story in a drawer for a month before submitting it. Students will step *in* soon enough and be immersed in the particulars of ministry, where too often the most pressing question will be, How can I get through Sunday? At seminary, students are encouraged to step back and to view the church in its catholicity. Of course, that wholeness is present in every congregation as it gathers around word and sacrament, but sometimes it's hard to see. In seminary we study the basis of the church's faithfulness and the breadth of its existence in the world. In *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis, the senior devil Screwtape tells his nephew Wormwood that the best way to turn a person off from the church is to have him visit one on Sunday morning, especially one in which the preaching is poor, the ushering is sloppy, and the singing is off-key. «But» he warns his nephew, do not let him see the church as «we see her—spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners.» [1] In my experience, there are many who first see the banners in seminary, and that vision carries them a long way.

Life in the Seedbed

The word seminary incorporates the Latin word for seed, *semen*. It is a seedbed for the church's ministry and is therefore preliminary it. It is John the Baptist to the church's ministry. A seedbed or a nursery is an unnatural place. It's all very lush but, if you look closely, you'll notice that all the plants and trees are neatly grouped according to their own kind, and most are not in the ground. So in a seminary: first years with first years; the Barthians with the Barthians, postliberals with postliberals; Norwegians with Norwegians; exegesis on Monday and Wednesday; pastoral care on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The first thing the new graduate learns is that the ministry literally does not conform to the seedbed; that is, it doesn't present itself in the same form in which we meet it in seminary.

A seedbed can be a pretty undramatic place. If you read the literature of Christian autobiography and memoir, you'll notice that there are few exciting conversions that take place in a theological school. The words «burning» and «seminary» rarely occur in the same sentence. The drama of conversion is usually played out in Carthage or Lower Manhattan where theories of Atonement are not on everyone's lips—one thinks of Dorothy Day being converted among the tenements of New York City. Often conversion occurs later in the pastorate itself when the pressure of events ruptures the commonplaces of ministry and the Holy Spirit bursts in. Martin Luther King was decisively converted two years *into* his first pastorate.

The seminary is also a more protected place than a congregation. In *Life Together*, which is his reflection on his small seminary in Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer reminds us that we should not take for granted the incredible blessing of spending the entire day with fellow Christians. [2] Life in the secular world doesn't offer that. The seminary is a nourishing world in which everyone acknowledges the lordship of the triune God, honors the sacramental life, and prays for one another daily – and all in the same linguistic idiom! In seminary, one doesn't have to worry about explaining the concept of grace to a five-year old child, an auto mechanic, a nurse, and an insurance executive – simultaneously. In seminary it's easier to get by on code words like «eschatology,» «ecclesiology,» and «pneumatology.» Say «Christology» in a theological school and everyone responds in unison, «High or Low?»

It's impossible for any congregation to duplicate the coherence of thought that one finds in a seminary; just as it is impossible for the most creative seminary to replicate the contingencies and koinonia of an ordinary congregation.

In preparation for this article, I asked a few

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pastors two questions on the relation of seminary and ministry: 1)When you got into the ministry what was it you wished you had been given in seminary but were not? And, 2) What was the most valuable learning you received in seminary? What they did *not* get tended to be an assortment of selected skills, such as administration or personal counseling, the absence of which makes for a difficult first year in ministry. What they *did* get tended to be bigger than skills, gifts with the potential to last a lifetime. And most of them did not come from the so-called practical courses.

At one of our alumni events, a former student spoke to me and gave testimony to what she received from her favorite course at Duke. She said to me, «When I was a brand new pastor out in the middle of nowhere, one-hundred miles from the nearest Starbucks, *the* one course, Prof. Lischer, that *saved* me in the ministry was . . .»

«Yes,» I said, «go on.»

«. . . was Early Church History,» she said. «It was in church history that I discovered that I was not the first to be sent to a lonely place; I wasn't the first to try to find God in my ministry; not the first to struggle with the meaning of suffering; and not the first to feel like quiting; I wasn't the first.»

I asked a Presbyterian friend about his best gift from seminary, and he said, «I learned how to pray in public.» «In worship class?» I said. «Oh no, Old Testament,» he replied, «in the prayers with which our professor opened class.»

Four Tasks of the Seminary

A few months ago, the Carnegie Foundation published a massive study titled *Educating Clergy* in which it lists four dimensions, or categories, of learning for which the seminary is responsible. We may not agree with their proposal, but it is a place to start. [3]

The first task is interpretation. It is hermeneutical in nature. How often in the midst of a theological conversation doesn't Jesus ask, What is written? How do you read? Not only, What is on the printed page? but, 'Given the lateness of the hour and the claims I am making, What do you make of it?' The seminary introduces the student to the classic texts of the tradition, beginning with the Bible, but also including the ecumenical creeds, many church documents, Luther, the Confessions, and much, much more. The students know many of these texts already, but the seminary teaches them *how* to read in a very specific way. It teaches how to read them instrumentally, for ministry. [4]

The second task is contextual. The church's authoritative texts have never existed in a vacuum and do not now. They have always been shaped and contested by other worldviews and other documents. The church has always been surrounded –sometimes by persecution, often by indifference, always by suffering, but surrounded nonetheless. The congregation is not an island of truth. It has a location, a postal code. It lives in a larger world of conflicting ideologies and needs. P.T. Forsyth defined theology as «the gospel taking its age seriously.» [5] The trick for both the seminary and church is knowing how to serve the age and knowing when to defy it.

The third task is performance. Some would say (if I may put it crassly), 'This is why we have seminaries: to produce professionals who can perform.' There is nothing more irritating to congregations than ministers who have not been adequately trained in the key performances of the gospel. There is something wrong when a former student calls and says, «I have my first funeral on Thursday. I have no idea what to do.» The seminary offers basic skills in liturgical and ecclesial leadership. The church has the right to expect them.

In its desire to produce credible priests, the church runs the risk of professionalism. Westerners, including western Christians, want their truth packaged and delivered to them in a particular mode: professionally. The word professional once denoted the mastery of complex material, its application to specific situations, and its practitioner's selfless commitment to those in his care. Professional*ism* in ministry imposes on itself extraneous criteria of accountability usually drawn from the social sciences. To these it adds concern for process, credentialing, and measurable outcomes, all

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of which are inherently incompatible with prophetic or priestly ministry.

The greater danger of professionalism, it seems to me, lies not in what a profession once *was,* but what it has come to be. Today a professional is virtually anyone who gets paid for his work. «Our staff is made up of trained professionals,» says my termite exterminator. It is a mark of a professional that he or she does for you what you cannot and should not do for yourself. As George Bernard Shaw put it, «All professions are conspiracies against the laity.» The Christian church, especially that part of it that celebrates the Priesthood of all Believers, should ask its seminaries what is meant by «the minister as a professional.»

The fourth task listed by the Carnegie Foundation is formation. American law schools regularly graduate people who do not know how to make an argument, write a brief, or behave in a courtroom. Yet no one is outraged, because law schools impart what the theologian Origen called «first principles.» They are confident that they are training students to think like lawyers. How does a theological school inscribe upon its students not only the technical proficiencies but also the habits, instincts, and the soul of a priest? And how does this training override our *other* habits: for example, to think first like a citizen, like a consumer, like well—off white person, like a professional?

The formation for ministry that many in my generation received was more a process of socialization into the ethos of the Lutheran ministry. Any formation we received almost by accident. I think this is because formation in faith was assumed. It was assumed that we all knew how to pray (doesn't everyone?). Past generations of theological students grew up in congregations just like the ones they hoped to serve; they were guided by pastors just like the *men* they hoped to become. It was assumed that right doctrine couldn't help but produce right ministry.

Prayer as a Counter-cultural Edcuation

When a seminary takes the fourth task, formation, seriously, it redefines the first three. A school doesn't engage in the formation of faithful persons and then proceed to teach New Testament or church history the way it is done in a religious studies program. We don't embrace spiritual values in one part of the curriculum and then the value-neutral assumptions of the Enlightenment in the rest. Instead of reading the Bible as an almanac of near Eastern myth, or mastering the ten stylistic devices of the Gospel of Luke, we teach students to do something more difficult: to read the Bible, as the poet Adrienne Rich put it, as if our lives depend on it. We sensitively examine the context in which we make theological claims, and instead of being defensive, reactive counter-punchers, always a half-step behind the digital revolution, we trust our material. We dare allow the gospel to interpret the world rather than vice-versa.

In the Gospel of Luke the disciples come to Jesus and make their only formal request for theological training. They say, «Lord, teach us to pray.» I can think of many other, more relevant questions they might have asked, such as, 'Teach us how to adapt to Hellenistic culture,' or 'Teach us to how to grow the organization,' or 'What exactly *are* the seven habits of an effective disciple?' but, no, this is their request. They ask him to teach them to do something they have been doing since they were children. A Jew who doesn't know how to pray — unthinkable! Apparently, before he could 'empower' them for ministry or «grow» a church, he would need to form them as his people.

Jesus could have replied, 'Follow the tradition. Just try harder to do what you've already been taught.' Or, 'Get in touch with the divinity within, and something will come to you.' But instead he taught them a prayer to memorize, the first stanza of which is not about us at all, but God: *your* name, *your* kingdom, *your* will. When it comes to us, our needs are simple: enough bread for today, right relationships, and deliverance from testing. The final stanza returns us to the opening. Once again we disappear, as it were, into the clouds of *your* kingdom, *your* power, *your* glory. Eternally. Yes.

In the previous chapter, chapter 10, Jesus is

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praying in the Spirit to the Father when he says, «I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to seminarians (my translation). When we teach children (and students) to pray, sometimes we concentrate more on the mechanics, like bow your head, fold your hands, but in fact when we teach prayer we are teaching *who* it is to whom we are pray. And we are saying that all of life — or, for our purposes, all of theological education — is a process of addressing God, listening faithfully, and dialoging with God.

The most important thing a seminary can do is to teach its students to pray. The seminary is a school for prayer. Its goal is to produce persons who know God and can help others know God. You will notice in the hard moments, when life is being won or lost, people's organizational needs tend to vanish. What is left exposed are questions like, «But how do I know I am a child of God?»

We arrive at university with a single dogma in our book bag, which is the non-negotiable certainty that every person's idea of God is as good as every other person's. Our only absolute is our relativism. Our culture's God, as Flannery O'Connor said in a letter to a friend, is a god «of our own sweet invention.» At seminary we encounter another God and another doctrine of God, the God who reveals himself as Trinity — Father, Son, Holy Spirit. In a culture in which G-O-D is a cipher for everything the nation aspires to, in which G-O-D is a placeholder for everything *I* need to be happy, we have the counter-cultural nerve to teach a different God. It is the triune God, who is the object of our prayers, the teacher of our prayers, and the enabler of our prayers. God is the listening Father, the praying Son, and the interceding Spirit. The most radical education we can offer begins with addressing the true God.

When church people voice their suspicion of the seminary, they may have in mind an academy that chatters *about* God but has forgotten how talk *to* God. At seminary begins the painful reorientation from talk *about* to talk *to*.

Like many seminaries and divinity schools, the one I teach at launches its students' education with a reading of Augustine's *Confessions*. I think we are sometimes attracted to the *Confessions* for the wrong reasons, that is, because Augustine's sense of irony is so modern, or because his self-awareness is so much like ours. But in fact we read him because he is so different from us. He deconstructs life as most people think it should be told and writes a new life lived in continuous dialogue with God. How many modern autobiographies and memoirs begin as his does? Where you might expect, 'I was born in a humble log cabin in northern Africa,' the first sentence of the *Confessions* is, *Magnus es, domine*. «God, you are great!» On the first page of his autobiography we find 7 *laudeos*, 8 *invocavos*, and 3 *domines*. This is the language of liturgy. Except now, an entire life will be displayed as a liturgical performance. This liturgical interpretation of life is not the same as a correct performance of the liturgy. Likewise, worship in seminary is not for the pragmatic purpose of teaching students how to do it, but for the formation of worshipping persons whose lives will be a prayer before God.

The Curricular Point

By formation I don't mean spirituality as a separate, superadded dimension of life (or the curriculum). Reread Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*, and you notice that in the chapter on Ministry the formation he stresses is not professional but human, the ministry of listening, the ministry of holding one's tongue, the ministry of meekness.

Popular spirituality often equates every significant voice in ones life with the voice of God. To this a Lutheran theological school has something to say. In the Lutheran seedbed one of the first things we learn is to differentiate God's voice from our own by listening for God's word of judgment and grace. At seminary, we learn that reconciliation comes with a *message* and not just a feeling.

Our training differs from religious studies in the following important respect: Here in the unlikely environment of classrooms, lectures, and grade point averages, our students receive

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information about law, gospel, justification — all of it— not as historical data but as saving knowledge. It's not merely a matter of knowing how to pull the levers of law and gospel but of discerning the human territory between them.

It was said of the philosopher Hegel, whose system of learning was all encompassing, that he understood everything there is to know— except what it is to live and die in the world. A seminary can acquaint you with a huge range of theological options. We can give you, perhaps not everything Hegel had, but much of it. But if you should graduate without even asking the question of what it is to live and die in the world, the bursar owes you a refund. «One thing I know,» the formerly blind man says in John 9, as if knowing who it is who has saved your life were a footnote to something more important. But it's the one thing that integrates and transforms all our learning and makes a school a seminary. We do know One who lived and died in the world, and now, as Hopkins says, «The world is charged with the grandeur of God.»

It's hard for a lowly seedbed to capture the worldliness of this truth, but once we do everything in the curriculum changes. And professors like me, who left the pastorate long ago, or others who never served in it, become preachers of the gospel in spite of themselves. Here in this *handling* of the gospel, the seminary and the parish, the seedbed and the field, come closest to convergence.

A seminary is never just an academic institution. It is always straining to be something more. It is always ascending; always transcending the factual content of its own material in order to shape its students. Its goal is not to inform but to transform. So, when we say Teach us to pray, we aren't treating prayer as one of the pious practices in the Christian life. We are expanding its meaning. Nor are we reducing the seminary to a Bible college. We are raising its sights toward a more challenging mission. We are asking the Lord: How can we be an institution that practices Christian teaching as an instrument of ministry? Lord, through faithful servants like our pastors and bishops, show us how to do that. How can we produce men and women on whose leadership others will rely because they know God?

Lutheranism is not the first to embrace this approach to the formation of clergy. The former chancellor of Jewish Theological Seminary recalls,

> «Rabbinical students at JTS spend most of their five or six years of study . . . immersed in learning Talmud, the legal codes, the Bible and its many commentaries, midrash, Hebrew, Aramaic, history, theology, and the like. . . . When they complete those studies, they are ordained as rabbis. Most then go out and become congregational leaders all over the country. Within a year or two, I begin hearing back from them. They complain that we didn't teach them what they really needed for their work. What they really needed was an MBA, a master's degree in counseling, and perhaps a few electives in reading architectural drawings and negotiating with contractors. Did we really need to spend so much time on Talmud? I try to explain that, had they not become [learned] through study of the 'holy vessels' of the tradition, the congregants would not have considered them entitled to play those other roles.» He goes on to ask,
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> «How does a professional school prepare its students both for the specific skills needed to perform the functions they must enact, while also preparing them to become the kinds of human beings . . . to whom others are ready to entrust the performance of those functions?» [6]

The baptism of a baby or the conduct of the Eucharist are not complex actions and do not require great technical know-how. To preach 50 sermons a year is more a matter of endurance than great rhetorical skill. To get on your knees at the foot of someone's hospital bed is not rocket science. But to *be* the person to whom these duties are entrusted, that is another matter.

Working Backwards: from Ministry to Theological Education

A few weeks ago, I was talking to my friend who has been a pastor for thirty years. By my calculus, he should be burnt out or coasting toward retirement by now. Instead, he seems to be one of those lucky people who gains new vitality from the ministry every day. He says to me in his maddeningly cheerful way, «Did you ever have one of those days in ministry where everything comes together and works perfectly?» He tells me that he had to be away from church from Wednesday to Saturday

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night and therefore had to be ready for Sunday by Tuesday night. He looks in the lectionary and it's the fifth consecutive reading from John 6. How much can you say about bread? So he cheats a little and goes back to last week's epistle where Paul says, «Don't let the sun go down upon your anger.» He writes a preachable sermon but then notices there is no good hymn for the day. «Very few hymns have the word anger in them,» he remarks. «I guess I'm going to have to write a hymn,» he says, «and by 7 p.m. on Tuesday I had a sermon and a decent common-meter hymn. And the beauty of it was there were only a couple of interruptions – a marriage counseling session and an emergency trip to a nursing home. Everything came together.» This is the same pastor who has created a capital campaign for missions, who goes with his youth into the local housing projects, and who sustains his ministry through a life of prayer. It's almost incidental to the story that I had called him to see how his chemotherapy was going.

Why tell this long story? Because his ministry was not self-devised or self-initiated. He is not an entrepreneur. His ministry is the result of formation. Some seminary somewhere helped shape him into a thoughtful, faithful person who is greater than the sum of his skills.

His ministry suggests a method for doing theological education, one that does not always begin with the expertise of the academy and end with the passivity of the consumer-church. What if we in the academy worked backwards from people like my friend? I would like to deduce from his character and wisdom the sort of education that might produce others like him.

Take a look at my friend's ministry and work backward. What kind of teaching would his seminary reward? What kind of teachers would it hire? Into what sort of programs would it put its money? Where would distance learning, virtual courses, the proliferation of degrees, and technology-based innovations – all of which reflect the professionalization of our society – fit into a community's life together?

The seminary can't reproduce in its programs the contingencies and koinonia of actual ministry. The answer is not more practical courses, but an entire curriculum that is rooted in the lived and multiple realities of the church. To that end, more and more seminaries are not only sending students out into the ministry but they are themselves investigating excellence in ministry and allowing it to shape their vision of academic faithfulness. [7] What we in the academy can do is pray for the wisdom that matches that of the church's most faithful and gifted practitioners.

In other words, when we academics go to the Lord, let's be sure we ask him for the right favor.

Endnotes

1 C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979 [1959]), pp. 6-7.
2 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1954), p. 17.
3 Charles Foster *et al*, eds, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), pp. 67-186.
4 See Richard Lischer, *The End of Words: The Language of Reconciliation in a Culture of Violence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), pp. 49-66.
5 P.T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980 [1907]), p. 19.
6 Ismar Schorsch, quoted in *Educating Clergy*, p. x.
7 See, for example, L. Gregory Jones and Kevin Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

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Summary

The nature of the relationship between theological education and the church is widely disputed. Innovations in seminary training and the rapidly changing context in which ministry is carried out have made it difficult to define their precise relationship. For a variety of reasons many in the church have come to distrust the integrity of theological education. And yet, on closer inspection, school and church have much in common, including their mission, a common worship life, and, most definitively, their handling of the gospel. In this, the seminary is preliminary to the life of a congregation. Its ordered existence is established for the sake of the congregation. The seminary is charged with four major tasks. They are hermeneutical, contextual, performative, and formative. The hermeneutical task introduces the student to the reading and interpretation of the Bible, theological classics, and other important literature. The contextual task assesses the immediate and wider «world» in which the church exercises its ministry. The performative task trains the student in pastoral and ecclesial leadership. It includes skills in preaching, teaching, liturgical leadership, counseling, and administration. The formative task is the most difficult to define. Through the many activities that make up a student's education, the formative task endeavors to inscribe pastoral character in the learner. In an era that has seen seminary training adjust its content to sociological and media influences, this paper asks seminaries to form persons for ministry in community through prayed engagement with the gospel. «Teach us to pray» symbolically represents the greatest of all seminary enterprises, one that, if grasped, will evoke the most creative and faithful ministry in the church. «Teach us to pray» is counter-cultural in that it rejects training that begins from demographics, politics, sociology, and psychology, and the many other disciplines that have fashioned the so-called «professional» ministry. It may be that theological education, in itself, does not have the resources to produce a healthy ministry. This article suggests a method for doing theological education that does not begin with the expertise of the academy and end with the passivity of the consumer church. The seminary should incorporate into its curriculum the wisdom of the most gifted practitioners of ministry. The answer is not more practical courses but an entire curriculum that is rooted in the lived and multiple realities of the church.

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