

## Theological Pedagogy<sup>1</sup>

In *Educating Clergy*, Foster, et al.,<sup>2</sup> presented the findings of a Carnegie and Lilly funded study begun in 2001 to research how academic settings influence clergy education. In the study, faculty from 18 seminaries and divinity schools were asked to reflect on their teaching practices and how they viewed the relationship between their teaching goals and their classroom practices.

Perhaps the most significant of the findings published in *Educating Clergy* was the considerable variety in seminary classroom pedagogy; so much so that no one pedagogical method dominated. Foster et al. reported four intentions for student learning that their respondents believed were most important in preparing students for clergy practice. None of the intentions were characterized by a signature pedagogy.<sup>3</sup> The intentions for student learning were (a) developing the capacity to interpret texts, situations, and relationships, (b) nurturing dispositions and habit integral to the spiritual and vocational formation of clergy, (c) heightening students' consciousness of the content and agency of historical and contemporary contexts, and (d) cultivating student performance in clergy roles and ways of thinking.<sup>4</sup>

### The Four Intentions

**Pedagogies of Interpretation.** Pedagogies used to introduce students to practices of interpretation are presumed central to the theological curriculum. These pedagogies are integral to teaching, preaching, caring, administration, and to any activity that will assist students in their ability to respond to the quest for meaning for themselves and others. Foster et al., discovered four elements within the pedagogies of interpretation: (a) the different perspectives faculty bring to the interpretive practices they are teaching, (b) their academic discipline, (c) pedagogical culture, and (d) the school's religious tradition. Typically, faculty apply practices of interpretation to develop students' ability to think critically while they are making sense of texts, situations, discussions, relationships, and events. They intentionally seek to cultivate the way students think and encourage them to associate these skills with their professional identities. Theological educators are creative in multiple ways when applying interpretive pedagogical methods. For example, Vaage<sup>5</sup> utilizes four cross-disciplinary books to foster understanding of what it means to read well in order to know more; all the while teaching exegetical skills before he ever introduces the biblical text students will exegete. Brown<sup>6</sup> employs a teaching method that encourages a journey of wonder when reading the Bible—going to the “strange new world” before returning transformed by the journey.

**Pedagogies of Formation.** One of the distinguishing features of theological education is the pedagogy of formation—the development of students who are spiritually sensible, have a

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<sup>1</sup> This handout was adapted by Linda Cannell from sections in Carolyn Poterek. *Effects of Constructive Controversy in Theological Education*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Seattle University, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> C.R. Foster, L.E. Dahill, L.A. Golemon and B.W. Tolentino. *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33

<sup>5</sup> L.E. Vaage. Learning to Read the Bible with Desire: Teaching the Eros of Exegesis in the Theological Classroom. *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 10 (2) 2007: 87-94.

<sup>6</sup> W.P. Brown. From Apology to Pedagogy: Interpreting the Bible Past and Present in the Seminary Classroom. *Interpretation*, 66 (4) 2012: 371-382.

deep faith commitment, and a personal quality of depth and integrity. Formation takes place both inside and outside the classroom. In theological education, formation is often cultivated through small groups, worship services, devotional practices and retreats, field education, clinical pastoral education, and prayer experiences. Foster et al. observe that this area of pedagogy presents many challenges for theological educators: Students come with traditions and previous values; students need to be moved to places of discovery past many points of naiveté they bring to their theological education; and students need to get to a place where their formation is grounded sufficiently to face conflicts in culture without being closed to hearing and humbly engaging other traditions. In dealing with the challenges that the pedagogy of formation presents, Foster et al. describe three strategies used by faculty: (a) practicing the presence of God, (b) practicing holiness, and (c) practicing religious leadership. Brookfield and Hess add that formational pedagogy,

First . . . focuses on the awakening and deepening of spiritual awareness. It is concerned with helping students explore processes of divine contemplation and faith development, often aided by a teachers' own modeling and disclosure of their own engagement of these processes. Second, formation focuses on the development of human qualities of empathy, compassion, and love deemed central to pastoral work.<sup>7</sup>

They suggest that to accomplish these two forms of pedagogy, educators must research their methodologies, teach adult learners with respect for their experience and background, and demonstrate that educators also are being formed.

Other approaches included an improvisational model, appreciative inquiry, and role-play.<sup>8</sup> Lincoln proposes that Master of Divinity (M.Div.) programs utilize a "Students-in-Seminary" model<sup>9</sup>, and Marmon<sup>10</sup> advocates the intentional use of *transformative learning theory* which incorporates intentional reflection, mentoring, and authenticity. Hinton<sup>11</sup> suggests re-appropriating religious education using methods that were used in the emergence of the Black Church. The methodology is informed by Thomas Groome's "shared Christian Praxis"<sup>12</sup> and may assist in informing the ways students engage in daily formation practices.

**Pedagogies of Contextualization.** Most of the content of the theological curriculum reflects a context or situation that requires analysis and understanding. Students are always

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<sup>7</sup> S.D. Brookfield and M.E. Hess. How Can We Teach Authentically? Reflective Practice in the Dialogical Classroom. In M.E. Hess and S.D. Brookfield (eds). *Teaching Reflectively in Theological Contexts: Promises and Contradictions*. (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 2008), p. 4.

<sup>8</sup>See P. Cha. Student Learning and Formation: An Improvisational Model. In M.L. Warford (ed). *Revitalizing Practice*. (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), pp. 33-65; M. Hess. Loving the Questions: Finding Food for the Future of Theological Education in the Lexington Seminary. *Theological Education*, 48 (1) 2013: 69-89; and P.D. Couture. Ritualized Play Using Role Play to Teach Pastoral Care and Counseling. *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 2 (2) 1999: 96.

<sup>9</sup> T. D. Lincoln. How Master of Divinity Education Changes Students: A Research-based Model. *Teaching Theology & Religion*. 13 (3) 2010: 208-222. The abstract includes the following description: "The students-in-seminary model is conceptually undergirded by life course theory. In the model, students attending seminary engage in a messy process in which they respond to competing demands of school, church, and family. . . . The author calls for further research to study how seminaries promote key messages to their students, the plasticity of students' sense of calling, the impact of church requirements on M.Div. students, and the complexity of life for multiple-role students."

<sup>10</sup> E.L. Marmon. Transformative Learning Theory: Connections with Christian Adult Education. *Christian Education Journal*, 10 (2) 2013: 424-431.

<sup>11</sup> M. Hinton. Back to the Future: Re-appropriating Religious Education—A Case Study Using the Black Church. *Religious Education*, 104 (1) 2009: 18-37.

<sup>12</sup> T. H. Groome. *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach To Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis*. (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1991)

learning more about themselves while engaged in theological education; but what is often most challenging for students when seeking to do theology is to contextualize the situations they are in as well as applying the new theological tools or frameworks they are learning.

The pedagogies of contextualization used by faculty help students to (a) develop a consciousness of the context, (b) participate constructively in their encounter of contexts, and (c) engage in social and systemic change or in transformational contexts.<sup>13</sup> These methods, among others, use a wide range of teaching methods from systematic reflection papers, to journal entries, sermon outlines, bible study designs, or role plays.<sup>14</sup>

**Pedagogies of Performance.** Pedagogies of performance provide ways for students to express their perspectives, or share the knowledge and skills they have gained from their engagement with interpretation, formation, and contextualization. Often there are high performance expectations for graduates when they become leaders in congregations and communities around the world. Performance methodologies are not focused on practicing skills related to these future roles; nor does the use of these methodologies suggest that vocation is simply performance. Rather pedagogies of performance are to reflect the complex realities of service and professional responsibilities.

A common theme found throughout the literature is the importance of modeling by those who teach. Students are always watching their teachers who are their leaders. Those who teach preaching are effective preachers; those who teach pastoral care model care beyond the theories students are critically analyzing in class, and so on. No matter the subject matter, modeling is part of developing students for leadership.

## Clergy Leadership

Norma Cook Everist<sup>15</sup> encourages those who teach leadership to become skilled in a variety of teaching approaches. However, the challenge is how to make leadership education appropriate for master's-level students whose knowledge of pastoral leadership is limited.

Sharon Daloz Parks argues that though the art of leadership is difficult to teach, it can be learned through the practices of adaptive leadership. Even with this leadership model, she points out that “it’s one thing to teach knowledge of a field, and it is quite another to prepare people to exercise the judgment and skill needed to bring that knowledge into the intricate systems of relationships that constitute the dynamic world of practice.”<sup>16</sup>

Craig Van Gelder when asked, “Can seminaries prepare missional leaders for congregations?” responded “possibly”.<sup>17</sup> He believes it is possible if the following elements are incorporated into the theological curriculum: (a) a missional hermeneutic, (b) missional

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<sup>13</sup> Foster et al., 2006

<sup>14</sup> See D.A. Thompson. Teaching What I'm Not: Embodiment, Race, and Theological Conversation in the Classroom. *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 3 (3) 2000: 164; and E.M. Bounds. Theological Reflection in Contextual Education: An Elusive Practice. In T. Brelsford and A.P. Rogers (eds). *Contextualizing Theological Education*. (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), pp. 17-28

<sup>15</sup> N.C. Everist. The Teaching of Leadership. *Journal Of Religious Leadership*. 11 (2) 2012: 5-31

<sup>16</sup> S.D. Parks. *Leadership Can Be Taught*. (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2005), p. 5

<sup>17</sup> C. Van Gelder, C. Theological Education and Missional Leadership Formation: Can Seminaries Prepare Missional Leaders for Congregations? In C. Van Gelder, C. (ed). *The Missional Church and Leadership Formation: Helping Congregations Develop Leadership Capacity*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 11-44

theology, (c) world as horizon, (d) focus on congregations, (d) integration of purposes, (e) attending to contexts, and (f) practical theology.<sup>18</sup>

In recent years, research has been conducted to test the effectiveness of the use of technology in support of learning. For example, online Greek and Hebrew classes have been successful when taking into consideration theories of adult education, instructional design, and learner-centered instruction.<sup>19</sup> During a 2010 Edinburgh Conference, an effort was made to create a model to offer theological courses using digital media. Student feedback validated the model.<sup>20</sup> As online learning in theological education continues to develop, it will be increasingly important for theological educators to note the different cultures and learning styles of their students and to adjust their pedagogical methods to suit these differences.

Faculty committed to the development of the whole person must be prepared to discern the questions that their students do not know enough to ask, and engage in dialogue with students that addresses race, privilege, professional practices, and the pastoral imagination.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 43-44

<sup>19</sup> J. Harlow. Successfully Teaching Biblical Languages Online at the Seminary Level: Guiding Principles of Course Design and Delivery. *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 10 (1) 2007: 13-24.

<sup>20</sup> C. Killacky. Developing A Useful Teaching Delivery Selection Model For Theological Seminaries Using Technology as a Medium. *Journal Of Adult Theological Education*, 8 (2) 2011: 166-182