

Seminary: A Place to Prepare Pastors?

Timothy Z. Witmer

It is difficult for me to give adequate expression to how amazing it is to be standing in this position today. I am particularly humbled because of the great respect I have for those who have held the office of Professor of Practical Theology here at Westminster. When the seminary began in 1929 there was no Professor of Practical Theology. It was taught, but by R. B. Kuiper who came from seventeen years of pastoral ministry and was listed as Professor of Systematic Theology. He, together with a few other part-time folk, provided what was necessary in the practical theology department. He left for a short time to be president of Calvin College, but then returned to Westminster in 1933 and was listed as Professor of Practical Theology. It was not for another thirty years that there was another full professor in practical theology, and his name was Edmund Clowney. Since then Conn, Fuller, Ortiz, Bettler, and Welch have been recognized as full professors.

My special thanks goes to another pastor, Dr. Ortiz, who saw the potential for usefulness in me and has helped this pastor function as professor, not always the easiest gap to span. Dr. Ortiz was the last individual inaugurated as Professor of Practical Theology here at the seminary, and I took the opportunity to review his inaugural address delivered in 1996. The title of his address was “Seminary: A Place for Missional Preparedness.” While there have been many things going through my mind to address

this morning, Manny’s title helped me to express the concern of my heart: “Seminary: A Place to Prepare Pastors?”

Any of you who know me at all, or have sat under my teaching, know that my conviction is that a healthy and strong church must be led by pastors and elders who understand that the heart of their calling is to be shepherds of God’s flock. My doctoral work focused on developing this concept, and I am always on the lookout for resources that will be helpful in unpacking this imagery. I am particularly grateful for the recent publication by Dr. Tim Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, which gives a rich biblical theology of the shepherding metaphor.¹ I have added his title to the growing bibliography of “books I wish I had written.” In terms of resources that explore the shepherding metaphor you have to be very careful. For example, there is a movie to be released soon entitled *The Good Shepherd*. Don’t be deceived, it’s about the origins of the CIA!

If the key to the advance of the kingdom of our Lord is through the church, then the proper preparation of undershepherds to lead his flock is crucial. As we heard earlier in the reading from Matt 9, as Jesus moved from village to village and looked across the

Timothy Z. Witmer is Professor of Practical Theology, Director of the M.Div. Program, and Director of the Mentored Ministry Program at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. This article is a revised version of his inaugural lecture, which was delivered on 29 November 2006.

¹ Timothy Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006).

faces of harassed and helpless people he felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. It was then that he said, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”

What does the church need? What has the church always needed? What will the church always need? Pastors who are shepherds. From whence will they come? How will they be trained? How should they be prepared? You will notice that the title of this address has a question mark. Dr. Ortiz’s inaugural address was more confidently framed: “Seminary: A Place for Missional Preparedness.” For my subject matter, there does seem to be a question mark in the minds of many about whether seminaries are doing the job in preparing pastors. Many have read the words of John Frame: “It seems to me that most seminary graduates are not *spiritually* ready for the challenges of the ministry. Seminaries not only frequently ‘refuse to do the work of the church’; they also tend to undo it.”² In an article published in *The Christian Century*, Edward Farley bemoans the fact that despite years of internal self-analysis and external pressure from the church and accreditors, little has changed in addressing the ineffectiveness of seminaries in training pastors. So, should there be a question mark? Is the seminary an effective place to prepare pastors, or not?

² John Frame, “Proposals for a New North American Model,” in *Missions and Theological Education in World Perspective* (ed. Harvey Conn and Samuel Rowen; Farmington, Mich.: Associates of Urbanus, 1984), 371; emphasis in the original.

I. *Retrospective: Patterns of Pastoral Training in America*

The theological seminary is a relative latecomer in models of ministerial training in America and was hoped to be the hybrid of the best of two earlier models. I would first of all like to look at those two previous models of pastoral training, positively and negatively, and translate this “best learning” into some humble action points to affirm the seminary as a place for preparing pastors. At the risk of being simplistic I would like to suggest that, generally speaking, there have been two dominant models in training pastors in the United States.

1. *The Academic Model*

The first generation of pastors in the American colonies naturally received their training in the old country. However, as the population in the New World grew, it became desirable to establish local institutions to prepare the next generation for pastoral ministry. The first colleges in America were created for the purpose of providing pastors for the growing communities of the colonies. For example, an early brochure for Harvard, published in 1643, justified the college’s existence this way: “To advance Learning and perpetuate it to Posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate Ministry to the Churches.” Samuel Simpson observed, “It was with reference first of all to the suitable training of ministers that the courses of study at Harvard were arranged.”³ Though they

³ Samuel Simpson, “Early Ministerial Training in America,” in *The Papers of the American Society of Church History*, 2d series, vol. 2 (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1910), 121.

followed the Medieval academic template of the European universities, it was clear that preparation for pastoral ministry was the mission. According to Quincy's *History of Harvard*:

The exercises of the students had the aspect of a theological rather than a literary institution. They were practiced twice a day in reading the Scriptures, giving an account of their proficiency in and experience in practical and spiritual truths, accompanied by theoretical observations on the language and logic of the sacred writings. They were carefully to attend to God's ordinances, and be examined on their profiting, commonplacing the sermons and repeating them publicly in the hall.⁴

Quincy also notes that subjects for study included logic, physics, etymology, syntax, ethics, politics, geometry, composition, and Hebrew. Greek was a requirement for admission.

It was not until 1722 that Harvard secured a separate instructor for Hebrew. He was one Judah Monis, a Jewish rabbi. At first, all undergraduates except freshmen were required to attend his instruction four days a week. "By 1755 it would appear that the college authorities had experienced a change of heart as to the importance of Hebrew in

⁴ Josiah Quincy, *The History of Harvard University* (2 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: John Owen, 1840); 1:190-91; quoted in Simpson, "Early Ministerial Training," 122.

the general curriculum, for instruction in that subject was reduced to one afternoon a week and attendance was made optional.”⁵

More than half of Harvard’s graduates in its first century of existence became pastors. However, even those graduates did not go into pastoral work immediately, but stayed at the college for the purpose of advanced study in theology. In his classic work on the training of the Protestant ministers in the United States, William Shewmaker writes, “Whatever may have been the number of exceptions, it was, in this earlier period, the custom among the Congregationalists of America for the graduate intending to study for the ministry to return to Harvard for two years, more or less, of study in ‘Divinity.’”⁶ The practice was common at Yale as well. After graduating from Yale in 1720, Jonathan Edwards stayed on for two years at the college to pursue theological studies.

At Harvard in 1721 and at Yale in 1756 the first professorships of divinity were established. At Yale, this came about as a result of the impact of the Great Awakening. A need was seen for a faculty member to be entrusted specifically with the care and instruction of students preparing for the ministry. This became necessary when the preparation of pastors was no longer the central mission of the broader college curriculum. As this approach became less satisfactory the majority of Congregational

⁵ Simpson, “Early Ministerial Training,” 123.

⁶ William Shewmaker, “The Training of the Protestant Ministry in the United States of America before the Establishment of Theological Seminaries,” in *The Papers of the American Society of Church History*, 2d series, vol. 6 (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1921), 104.

and Presbyterian candidates received specialized ministerial training through private teachers in what can rightly be called the apprenticeship model.

2. The Apprenticeship Model

Toward the middle of the eighteenth century a new practice began first among the Congregationalists and then the Presbyterians in which experienced pastors would take candidates for the ministry not only under their care but sometimes into their homes. One of the first and most notable of these was Congregationalist pastor Joseph Bellamy of Bethlehem, Connecticut, whose ministry is described this way in Sprague's *Annals of the American Pulpit*:

From the time that Mr. Bellamy resumed the stated charge of his flock, at the close of his labors as an itinerant, he commenced assisting young men in their theological studies preparatory for the ministry. And in this department of labor he soon became highly distinguished. Many of the most eminent ministers of New England, of the last generation, were trained, in a great measure, under his instructions. It was his custom to furnish his students with a set of questions covering the whole field of Theology, and then to give them a list of books corresponding to the several subjects which they were to investigate; and, in the progress of their inquiries, he was accustomed almost daily to examine them, to meet whatever difficulties they might have found, and to put himself in the attitude of an objector, with a view at once to extend their knowledge and increase

their intellectual acumen. When they had gone through the prescribed course of reading, he required them to write dissertations on the several subjects which had occupied their attention; and afterwards, sermons on those points of doctrine which he deemed most important; and finally, sermons on such experimental and practical topics as they might choose to select. *He was particularly earnest in inculcating the importance of a high tone of spiritual feeling, as an element of ministerial character and success.* His students are said to have formed the very highest idea of his talents and character, and, in some instances, to have regarded him with a veneration bordering well nigh upon idolatry.⁷

Bellamy trained one hundred candidates for ministry from 1742 to 1790. There were many other pastors who made themselves available to offer such training. Nathaniel Emmons trained eighty-seven ministerial students from 1769 to 1840. It should be noted that most of this training was “graduate” training, meaning that those coming had already attended one of the colleges.

This pattern also existed among the early Presbyterians. Among the most notable of pastors who gave himself to the equipping of young men for the ministry was William Tennant, who founded what became known as the Log College, not far from here at Neshaminy, Bucks County. The difference here was that men came here to prepare for the ministry who did not attend one of the colleges. Tennant sought to provide the basic

⁷ William Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit* (9 vols.; New York: Carter & Bros., 1857–1859), 1:405-6; emphasis added.

liberal arts education as well as training for pastoral ministry. This “log college” became the model for many other such training centers.

Samuel Blair, a graduate of Tennant’s Log College established another such institution at Fagg’s Manor in Chester County, Pennsylvania, and from this school came Samuel Davies, later president of Princeton, besides John Rogers, James Finley, and Robert Smith, all of whom became educational and religious leaders of distinction. Samuel Finley established another “log college” at Nottingham, Pennsylvania, the most famous of whose graduates was Dr. Benjamin Rush, who as an influential Presbyterian layman was active in establishing Dickinson College.

Another such school was that at Pequea in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, from which came John McMillan, who in turn established a “log college” in southwestern Pennsylvania.⁸ An academy in Western Pennsylvania established for ministerial training by five Presbyterian ministers and fourteen laymen was later reincorporated as the University of Pittsburgh. Of the forty permanent colleges and universities established in the United States between 1780 and 1829, thirteen were established by Presbyterians, four by Congregationalists, one by Congregationalists and Presbyterians in cooperation, eleven by other denominations, and eleven by the states.⁹

⁸ William Warren Sweet, *The Presbyterians, 1783–1840: A Collection of Source Materials* (vol. 2 of *Religion on the American Frontier*; New York: Harper & Bros., 1936), 70-71.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

It should be noted that an important influence in the growth of these log colleges and ministerial academies was the impact of the Great Awakening in the United States which increased not only the numbers in the churches, and the number of churches, but the need for qualified pastors to care for these increasing numbers of professing Christians across the countryside.

Concurrent with the growth of less formal approaches to ministerial education was the decline in the number of students entering the colleges with a view toward preparing for the ministry. For example, of the 540 students who graduated from Yale between 1792 and 1805, only 109 were preparing for the ministry while 182 became lawyers.¹⁰ This trend continued, and this was not the only problem. After the American War of Independence the spiritual climate on the college campuses declined dramatically. Lyman Beecher described the conditions at Yale in the 1790s: “The college was in a most ungodly state. The church was almost extinct. Most of the students were skeptical, and rowdies were plenty.”¹¹ Things weren’t any better at Dartmouth where only one member of the class of 1799 was known as a professing Christian.

II. *Theological Seminaries*

¹⁰ William Warren Sweet, “The Rise of Theological Schools in America,” *CH* 6 (1937): 264 n. 13.

¹¹ William Warren Sweet, “The Churches as Moral Courts of the Frontier,” *CH* 2 (1933): 6.

It was in this environment that theological seminaries were founded. The first seminary in the United States was begun in New York by the Dutch Reformed Church in 1784. It later moved to New Brunswick, New Jersey. The Presbyterians and Congregationalists were not far behind. The first Congregationalist seminary was established at Andover, Massachusetts, in 1807. Princeton was founded by the Presbyterians in 1812, and in 1815 Harvard expanded its professorship of divinity to a divinity school. It was the increase in demand together with the diminishing source of supply that led to the establishment of seminaries.

Not all ecclesiastical bodies in the United States held theological education in such high regard. As Prof. Clair Davis used to say, “While Presbyterians were establishing colleges, academies, and seminaries, the Baptists and Methodists were planting churches.” In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Methodists and Baptists were skeptical about the advantages of seminary education. The circuit-riding Methodist preacher Peter Cartwright “compared the theologically educated preachers that he knew to the pale lettuce ‘growing under the shade of a peach tree’ or to ‘a gosling that has got the waddles wading in the dew.’”¹² However, they eventually changed their views, first, as they saw the impact the Presbyterian and Congregational graduates were having, and, secondly, as they witnessed “the influence that was exerted by educated and wealthy laymen who began to demand ministers of whom they need not feel ashamed.

¹² Sweet, “The Rise of Theological Schools in America,” 271.

Trained ministers, they said, were needed to attract the cultured people of the cities, and scholars were needed to refute the attacks upon their theology.”¹³

In any case, the burden for the training of pastors shifted to theological seminaries or divinity schools attached to the existing universities. The theological seminary was thought to be a good hybrid of the two earlier models, the academic model and the apprenticeship model. However, by the middle of the nineteenth century doubts were being raised as to the effectiveness of this approach.

The name Gardner Spring is known to those who have done any study in the area of the history of theological education. He was himself a Yale graduate in the class of 1805 and had a fruitful ministry for the next sixty years in New York City. He was so well respected among Presbyterians that he became a member of the board of Princeton Seminary and held that position for many years. After he had served on the board for thirty-four years, he wrote a book in 1848 entitled *The Power of the Pulpit*. He had some critical comments to make about the quality of the seminary’s graduates, particularly in contrast to those who had experienced the old way of being trained under the tutelage of an experienced pastor. Of the change in approach he notes, “It was not unnatural, that in contemplating the change from this system of education to that which is now pursued by the theological seminaries, a doubt should have suggested itself to the minds of our fathers, whether, on the whole, it would be a change for the better.”¹⁴ He asks the

¹³ Ibid., 272.

¹⁴ Gardner Spring, *The Power of the Pulpit* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1986), 200.

question, “May there not be some latent defect in the modern system of educating young men for the Gospel ministry?”¹⁵ He then goes on to quote Princeton faculty member Samuel Miller who noted, “How difficult it is, even in this day of theological seminaries, to supply an important vacant congregation with a pastor, in whom the *union of eminent learning, talents, and piety* is considered indispensable.”¹⁶

It is the sentiments of Dr. Miller that truly identify the challenge: “the union of eminent learning, talents, and piety.” Rev. Spring expresses his concern this way:

Men of letters, men of research, men of taste, and accomplished scholars, who, like the rest of mankind, have the remnants of all that is unhallowed in the pride and ambition of the human heart, may look upon it as a miracle of mercy, if they make not shipwreck of a good conscience in the great work of the Gospel ministry. The age [in which we live] is one in which the love of learning rather than the love of Christ, is easily substituted as the great stimulus to ministerial effort; and in which it were not surprising if men are found occupying the sacred office, whose greenest laurels are gathered from the tree of knowledge, rather than from the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God.¹⁷

These sentiments are echoed in our own generation by John Frame as he writes:

¹⁵ Ibid., 198.

¹⁶ Samuel Miller, quoted in *ibid.*; emphasis added.

¹⁷ Spring, *Power of the Pulpit*, 201.

The academic machinery is simply incapable of measuring the things that really matter—obedience to God’s Word, perseverance in prayer, self-control, ability to rule without pride, the spiritual power of preaching in the conversion of people and the edification of the church.¹⁸

His concerns for the snares of the academy model mirror those of Gardner Spring, and Frame expresses them perhaps even more forcefully:

More important, such seminaries convey a false impression (to the churches, to their students, and to themselves!) as to how the “knowledge of God” is attained. A person does not become qualified for the ministry simply by writing a number of “good papers” and memorizing enough material to pass all the exams. To give the impression that one does, as the theological academies do, is to encourage a false pride in learning, a knowledge that “puffs up” (1 Cor 8:1), a gnosticism that in the past has led the church far from the truth of God’s Word.¹⁹

Even with his serious concerns, Spring does not advocate the dissolution of the seminaries. Frame, on the other hand, has a more radical approach when he writes, “I propose first that we dump the academic model once for all—degrees, accreditation,

¹⁸ Frame, “Proposals for a New North American Model,” 377.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 377-78.

tenure, the works.”²⁰ He proposes the establishment of “Christian Communities” where “teachers, ministerial candidates, and their families live together, eat together, work together. Teachers will ordinarily be experienced in the pastoral and/or evangelistic activity. The major qualification for teachers is that they be skilled in ‘teaching teachers’ (2 Tim 2:2).”²¹

It must quickly be added that neither Spring nor Frame denigrates the importance of the need for Christian scholarship or for a “learned” ministry. But can the perceived weaknesses be addressed, the concern for the union of “eminent learning, talents, and piety”? The pendulum seems to swing back and forth from the concern for “eminent learning” of the academy to the broader concerns for pastoral preparation described earlier as “talents and piety” seen in the apprenticeship model. Does the situation have to be either/or? If it is agreed that all of these elements are critical ingredients for preparing pastors for gospel ministry, can the seminary be an effective means to that end? The answer is a qualified “yes.” (Of course it is a qualified “yes”; this is Westminster!) I will be so bold as to suggest four imperatives to be heeded if the seminary is to continue to be an effective place to prepare pastors. I would also say that a seminary’s effectiveness *in the past* is directly related to how well it has reflected these four principles. As these imperatives are presented, you will see that they seek to take the best of the academic and apprenticeship models. While much of what follows would apply to any seminary that would seek to train pastors, my interest is directly in this seminary.

²⁰ Ibid., 377.

²¹ Ibid., 379.

III. *Prospective: Four Imperatives Required to Improve the Seminary as a Place to Prepare Pastors*

Imperative 1. *Renew the Commitment to the Mission to Prepare Pastors*

Our brief survey of pastoral training in America has shown how important it is to embrace clearly pastoral preparation as a fundamental commitment. When the early colleges were focused on preparing pastors, they were effective; but when their mission was bifurcated and lost in the sea of other academic pursuits, they became increasingly ineffective. This was further aggravated, unintentionally, by the appointment of Professors of Divinity whose job it became to prepare the pastors. The mission of the institutions as a whole had changed.

As the seminary movement came into full bloom, there was always, and continues to be, the pressure to become a graduate school of theology rather than a seminary for pastors. As Leith Anderson has written in *A Church for the Twenty-First Century*, “Traditional seminary education is designed to train research theologians who are to become parish practitioners. Probably they are adequately equipped for neither.”²² In the apprenticeship model, the purpose was always right in front of pastor and student as they were learning from a pastor in the context of a congregation’s care.

What about here at Westminster? The heart of the mission of Westminster Seminary from the very beginning was to prepare men for gospel ministry. While much

²² Leith Anderson, *A Church for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1992), 46.

of what we read surrounding the beginning of Westminster focuses on the need for a new Presbyterian seminary in light of the theological liberalism at Princeton, the underlying purpose remained unchanged: to prepare men for pastoral ministry. In a brief news item in the August 3, 1929, issue of the *Sunday School Times* there was an announcement about the establishment of a new seminary, and it quoted Machen who said that, in light of what was happening at Princeton, “We must have at least one sound source of ministerial supply.”²³ In the same publication later that month, O. T. Allis gave a brief outline of the course of studies that was to characterize the new seminary. He said, speaking of Westminster as a place for the study of the Bible as the sword of the Spirit, “A sword is dangerous in the hands of the unskillful and the sword of the Spirit has a sharp edge. If the minister is to wield that sword effectively, he needs careful instruction.”²⁴ Notice that his focus was on preparing “the minister.” In Machen’s address delivered at the opening of the seminary the next month, as he introduced the centrality of the Scriptures to the plan for instruction, he stated:

We believe, on the contrary, that God has been pleased to reveal himself to man and to redeem man once for all from the guilt and power of sin. The record of that revelation and redemption is contained in the Holy Scriptures, and it is with the

²³ J. Gresham Machen, “A New Theological Seminary,” *The Sunday School Times* 71, no. 31 (August 3, 1929): 425.

²⁴ O. T. Allis, “The New Presbyterian Seminary,” *The Sunday School Times* 71, no. 35 (August 31, 1929): 476.

Holy Scriptures, and not merely with the human phenomenon of religion, that *candidates for the ministry* should learn to deal.²⁵

A booklet entitled *Preliminary Announcements* was printed as the seminary began and noted that “there is no charge for tuition or room rent.” Ah, how things have changed! In describing the curriculum it humbly states, “The course of study prescribed for the certificate at the seminary is designed to provide a complete and symmetrical training for the gospel ministry.”²⁶ Westminster’s first academic catalogue, after recounting the unfortunate developments at Princeton, states that the seminary was founded to “provide a truly evangelical and truly Presbyterian course of *ministerial* supply.”²⁷ Just a few years ago, the seminary adopted a new mission statement, and the first bullet point listed after the core values are enumerated is: “Forming men for the ordained Gospel ministry as pastors, teachers, evangelists, missionaries, and other tasks

²⁵ J. Gresham Machen, *Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Purpose and Plan* (address delivered at the opening of Westminster Theological Seminary in Witherspoon Hall, Philadelphia, 25 September 1929, and published in *The Presbyterian* 99 [October 10, 1929]: 6-9, quote appears on 6; emphasis added).

²⁶ *Westminster Theological Seminary: Preliminary Announcements* (1929–1930), 8. A certificate was the description of what was granted upon completion of the program in the early days of the seminary.

²⁷ *Catalogue of Westminster Theological Seminary* (1929–1930), 16; emphasis added.

specified by the church.” As the statement continues, it reminds us that this is not the only thing that we do, but it is the heart of what we do and always has been since the seminary opened its doors.

Through the years I have heard it is said, “If you want to be a scholar, go to Westminster. If you want to be a pastor, go somewhere else.” This is somewhat perplexing given the remarkable catalogue of effective pastors who have graduated from Westminster including 518 alumni serving in the Presbyterian Church in America and 278 serving in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Many of these have been looked to as leaders in their denominations.

Maybe it is a weakness of the department of practical theology. This is also perplexing to me inasmuch as three of the most significant and lasting contributions to the contemporary church have come through the practical theology faculty at Westminster. I am talking about the *original* Christ-centered preaching emphasis in the rich redemptive-historical approach to preaching of Clowney and Craven; the biblical counseling revolution of Adams, Bettler, Powlison, and Welch; and the remarkable work of Conn and Ortiz in urban missions.

So what about this commitment to “form pastors”? God has blessed the work of the seminary so that it has had to broaden its mission. This expansion has been reflected in the addition of new degree programs through the years, some of which are designed to help us meet the challenge of the third bullet point of the seminary mission statement, which says that we are committed to “serv[ing] as a center for Christian research and scholarship and communicating the fruits of our labors to the Church and the world.”

The Master of Arts in Religion (M.A.R.) and the Ph.D. programs fit into this category and have been richly blessed in accomplishing this mission. It is important to say, therefore, that preparing pastors is not the *only* mission of Westminster Seminary.

When it comes to the commitment to prepare pastors, an important way that we can focus is to make it clear that the Master of Divinity program, as the continuation of the Bachelor of Divinity degree that ministerial students received in the old days, represents the heart of the mission of our founders, which was to prepare pastors. I understand that there are students in the M.Div. program who may not be moving toward pastoral ministry, but it must be clear that the primary purpose of the program is ministerial preparation. This is clear not only in Westminster's mission statement but also in the description of the purpose of M.Div. programs in the accrediting standards of the Association of Theological Schools.²⁸ If seminaries are to be an effective place to prepare pastors, this commitment must be clearly embraced and supported in order to be successful. This is the foundation upon which the following imperatives must be built.

Imperative 2. *Embrace a Holistic Picture of Ministerial Formation*

If we understand that the heart of our mission is “forming men for the ordained Gospel ministry,” then our goal is to form a person, not a professional. Our commitment must not be merely the transmission of information but the transformation of character. We must have a holistic picture of ministerial formation including, as Miller put it, “eminent learning, talents, and piety.” We must hasten to reemphasize the fact that

²⁸ *Association of Theological Schools Bulletin* 24, Part 1 (1998): 93.

eminent learning continues to be crucial in our times. According to Eddie Gibbs, “There is a danger of a chasm being created between academic theology and training in ministry competencies. The challenges presented by both modernity and postmodernity require greater theologically informed discernment, not less.”²⁹ Therefore, I am not suggesting that we “dumb down” what we do. Not at all. Westminster’s reputation for academic excellence should not be compromised. Our interest in academic excellence is not based on a concern, as we saw earlier, that we produce “ministers of whom wealthy and educated laymen are not ashamed,” but rather who will be “diligent to present themselves to God as workmen who do not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15).

Having said this, I will also add something that surely goes without saying, that all that we do must be grounded in an uncompromising commitment to the authority of the Scriptures. Where there is no authoritative Scripture, there is no authoritative message; where there is no authoritative message, there is no need for an authoritative messenger; and if there is no need for such a messenger, whose work and message are grounded in the authoritative Word of God, there is no need for a seminary at all. The death knell to any institution seeking to prepare pastors is the failure to uphold a robust biblical orthodoxy grounded in reputable scholarship. After all, Westminster was founded in the wake of Princeton’s departure from this fundamental commitment.

²⁹ Eddie Gibbs, *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 98.

If our mission is to prepare pastors, we must constantly remind ourselves of the comprehensiveness of the task, that our goal is to form a *person*, not a *professional*. The strength of the apprenticeship model here is clear. In Archibald Alexander's wonderful history of the Log College, he wrote of Gilbert Tennant's concern for his students:

But above all other things, the purity of the ministry was his care; and, therefore, at the hazard of the displeasure of many and in the face of reproach, he zealously urged every Scriptural method by which carnal and earthly-minded men might be kept from entering it, and men of piety and zeal as well as learning introduced.³⁰

More recently, Robert Banks has warned that the current model of theological education emphasizes “*knowing*, at the expense of *doing*, and *being*” and that “the professional school model now dominates, and this continues to ignore the *being* of the student, to exalt professionalism over calling and vocation.”³¹ In our own tradition, Prof. Conn asked these penetrating questions:

Is it not true that the Bible suggests relatively few criteria for the elder or for the pastor that relate to what one knows? Is it not true that our examinations for

³⁰ Archibald Alexander, *The Log College* (London: Banner of Truth, 1968), 27.

Gilbert Tennant, William's eldest son, was also involved in the work of the Log College.

³¹ Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 135; emphasis in the original.

ordination focus by and large on what information the candidate has gathered and can reproduce with a maximum of ease before his peers? Is there not almost a hidden presumption in most of us that if a ministerial graduate has graduated from Seminary X or Bible School Y he must be qualified? How deeply is our concept of ordination dictated by [what Ward calls] the educational establishment?³²

These are questions that concern both the church and the seminary. Among Westminster's core values is the commitment to develop "a learned ministry set in the lifestyle of humble and 'holy affection' for Jesus Christ." The power of the gospel should have deeply impacted the person's own life. The shepherd of God's flock must understand that he himself is a sheep and is dependent upon the Good Shepherd. He must know the Lord himself and rely on him to be fed, led, and protected. He himself must be transformed by the very Word he seeks to proclaim. Sinclair Ferguson reminds us:

Preaching to the heart, then, is not merely a matter of technique or homiletic method or style. These things have their proper place and relevance. But the more fundamental, indeed, essential thing for the preacher is surely the fact that something has happened to his own heart; it has been laid bare before God by His Word. He, in turn, lays it bare in his ministry before those to whom he ministers. And within that two-fold personal context, the goal he has in view is so to lay

³² Harvie Conn, *Evangelism: Doing Justice and Preaching Grace* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1982), 93.

bare the truth of the Word of God that the hearts of those who hear are opened vertically to God and horizontally to one another.³³

A pastor should be one who maintains a vital walk with Christ and who relies on the power of the Holy Spirit not only for power in ministry but also for his personal growth and conformity to the image of Jesus Christ his Shepherd.

On one of George Whitefield's many visits to Philadelphia, he visited the Log College and heard Gilbert Tennant preach. Of this experience Whitefield said, "He convinced me more and more that we can preach the gospel of Christ no further than we have experienced the power of it in our own hearts."³⁴ How important is this? It is crucial! For the past three years Westminster has partnered with Covenant and Reformed Theological Seminaries in an initiative called "The Pastors Summit."³⁵ An important element in the initiative is the regular gathering of cohorts of veteran pastors with the goal of encouraging them in their ministries. There is also an important research element in the project in which we have been able to ascertain those factors that contribute to longevity and fruitfulness in pastoral ministry. They are, in this order: spiritual formation, self-development (including renewal of their sense of calling to ministry), emotional

³³ Sinclair Ferguson, "Preaching to the Heart," in *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching* (ed. Don Kistler; Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 2002), 195-96.

³⁴ Alexander, *The Log College*, 30.

³⁵ This is part of a grant received from the Lilly Foundation in a program entitled "Sustaining Pastoral Excellence."

intelligence (including growth in emotional maturity and ability to relate to others), marriage and family, and, finally, leadership and management.³⁶ Note that only one of these concerns has to do with ministry competence as normally conceived. The others relate to spiritual formation, character development, and relationships.

The benefit of this kind of study is that it not only helps those who are already in the ministry, but gives all of us who are involved in some way in preparing men for gospel ministry a “heads up” in terms of matters we should address. Gardner Spring, in his critique of the seminary system, bemoaned the challenge of such a comprehensive approach given the sheer number of students. It is crucial that we not only encourage the efforts of the Dean of Students in focusing holistic ministerial formation, but also, as faculty members, that we think of creative ways to provide support and direction for our students. We must remember that our task is to prepare those who, as Peter says, will prove to be “examples to the flock” (1 Pet 5:3).

If a holistic picture of ministerial formation is embraced, we must be concerned to remember that we are forming not merely *preachers*, but *pastors*. As many of you know, for the first time in the history of our seminary, we have approved a series of core values in preaching. Among those core values is one entitled “The Preacher and the Congregation.” Here is the issue raised by that core value:

³⁶ Bob Burns, *Ministry for the Long Haul* (personal preview of PowerPoint presentation, n.d.).

What is a good sermon? The preacher can have the exegesis right, make all the proper redemptive-historical connections, have a clear outline and clever illustrations, but if it is not preached from his heart to the hearts of his people with specific knowledge and concerns for them, then it is not truly a sermon. To affirm with the Bible that “the shepherd knows his sheep” communicates a deep awareness of the wounds that need to be healed, the weaknesses that need to be strengthened, and the strays that need to be sought. From the very earliest courses in practical theology, students are exposed to a holistic view of pastoral ministry, to the comprehensive responsibilities of the pastor as shepherd. Producing faithful shepherds who are not only concerned to feed the sheep, but also to know, lead, and protect them must be the goal of ministerial formation in general and the context for fruitful preaching in particular. Our goal as a seminary must be to be used by the Lord to shape pastors in the best sense of the word³⁷ and not merely pulpiteers.³⁸

Even if the preacher accomplished all of the above, his efforts will be fruitless unless his preaching ministry is in the context of faithful pastoral ministry. As William Still reminds us:

³⁷ The English word “pastor” is from the Latin word for “shepherd.”

³⁸ Timothy Witmer, *Preaching at Westminster* (unpublished internal document),

The pastor by definition is a shepherd, the undershepherd of the flock of God. His primary task is to feed the flock by leading them to green pastures. He also has to care for them when they are sick or hurt, and seek them when they go astray. The importance of the pastor depends on the value of the sheep.³⁹

The pastor is under orders from the Chief Shepherd to care for the flock for whom he shed his blood. If the imperative of a holistic picture of ministerial formation is embraced, then the third imperative naturally follows.

Imperative 3. Accomplish the Mission in Partnership with the Church

If the seminary is to be a place to prepare pastors, a vital partnership with the local church must be cultivated. As mentioned earlier, a distinct advantage of the apprenticeship model was the context of the community of faith and the recognition of the importance of engagement with the church in preparing pastors. As I like to say, “It takes a flock to shape a shepherd.”

The first theological seminaries to which we referred earlier were founded by various churches. You would have thought that this would have been the perfect arrangement, but it did not take long for the respective institutions to slowly part ways. The relationship with the church is crucial to the formation of pastors. After all, the church is ultimately responsible to ascertain the gifts and calling of individuals for ministry. Undoubtedly, it is for this reason that our accrediting body, The Association of

³⁹ William Still, *The Work of the Pastor* (Edinburgh: Paternoster, 1984), 1.

Theological Schools, some years ago added the requirement for supervised field education, what we know here at Westminster as mentored ministry. This required engagement with the practice of ministry in the church is a reminder that the desired outcome must include competency in the practice of ministry in the context of the church. This area of development was of concern to the founding faculty of Westminster as well. Again we refer to the very first academic catalogue, under the heading “Vacations”:

The summer vacation gives to students a suitable opportunity for engaging in preaching and other Christian work under the direction of pastors, presbyteries, or mission boards. Such work furnishes an important supplement to the training of the seminary, affording experience and familiarity with the active duties of the ministry, which will be invaluable as a part of the preparation for the sacred office.⁴⁰

We are blessed to have scores of churches who partner with us in providing mentored ministry opportunities for our students, and twenty-three churches among those are part of our Teaching Churches Network who are committed not only to help our students complete the field education experience required by the seminary, but also to help students complete the requirements for ordination in their respective judicatories. Teaching churches relate to the seminary the way teaching hospitals relate to medical

⁴⁰ *Catalogue of Westminster Theological Seminary (1929–1930)*, 32.

schools, working together to sharpen and provide supervision in their respective scope of training.

We must continue to think creatively about how we can reinforce this strategic relationship. We encourage our students to be involved in the local church. It has also been an important priority of the seminary to see its faculty members involved in the church. The current faculty manual requires that “75% of voting faculty be ordained teaching and ruling elders, with a majority being ordained ministers.”⁴¹ Certainly all faculty should be active contributing members of a local congregation. This activity strengthens the relationship with the local church. I like the way Donald Messer puts it in his book *Calling Church and Seminary into the 21st Century*. He reminds the reader of the old academy faculty mantra “publish or perish.” He suggests that what it must be in the twenty-first century is “publish and parish.”⁴² In addition to the connection established through mentored ministry, pastors should be encouraged to come on campus and meet with students. They should also be welcomed into the classroom to share the wisdom of their experience in ministry.

The final imperative if the seminary is to be effective in preparing pastors focuses on the importance of the faculty in the process.

Imperative 4. *Review Our Approach in the Classroom*

⁴¹ *Westminster Theological Seminary Faculty Manual* (May 2006), 3.

⁴² Donald Messer, *Calling the Church into the 21st Century* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 101.

If the M.Div. program is designed to prepare pastors it must have an impact on our pedagogical approach. This includes not merely the practical theology faculty but everyone who teaches a required course in the M.Div. program. We are eager to say that we give students the “tools” for a lifetime of ministry. That is admirable. However, it is not merely enough to give someone a tool. Those of you who know me well know that it is not just enough to give me a tool. You have to show me how to use it, and even then it’s very risky!

Remember the words of O. T. Allis? “A sword is dangerous in the hands of the unskillful and the sword of the Spirit has a sharp edge. If the minister is to wield that sword effectively, he needs careful instruction.” Again, Eddie Gibbs writes, “The issue is not whether theology per se is important but *what kind* of theology. It must be theological training that provides the skills to apply the Biblical texts to contemporary situations.”⁴³ Richard Mouw writes “Given the centrality of ministerial formation in the work of the seminary, it is fair to say that seminary scholarship and teaching must have a *ministry-related* focus.”⁴⁴ Granted, Mouw casts the net of “ministry” very broadly, but his concern is that there be “a certain kind of intentionality of focus.”⁴⁵ The apprenticeship model had an advantage here as well in that the students were being taught in an environment that was more easily conducive to application and contextualization. As faculty members, we

⁴³ Gibbs, *ChurchNext*, 99; emphasis in the original.

⁴⁴ Richard Mouw, “Faculty as Scholars and Teachers,” *Theological Education* 28 (1991): 77; emphasis in the original.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

must all continually ask ourselves, “How is the way that I teach my subject matter preparing my students for ministry?”

It has been suggested that the practical theology department exists to address how the material taught in other classes applies to life and ministry. I have actually heard this said. I would never want the responsibility to do this for you. You would not *want* to give us the responsibility to do this for you! There should be no such thing as unapplied theology; that is why I do not like the name “practical theology” because it implies that the rest is “impractical”!

Harvie Conn’s 1983 inaugural lecture recounted John Frame’s definition of theology as “simply the application of Scripture to all areas of human life. We do not know what the Scriptures say until we know how it relates to our world.”⁴⁶ It is all the more important for us to strive to make these connections given that we live in a much more complicated world than did the founders of Westminster. The challenges of the disintegrating geographical barriers of the increasingly “flat world” of globalization are only matched by the deteriorating moral and authoritative boundaries of postmodernism. Failing to assist our students to make these connections is to present a different kind of “brute facts” or worse, “brute theology,” not truth disconnected from God, but God’s truth disconnected from God’s world. All of us in each of our disciplines must strive to answer the “So what?” question.

⁴⁶ John Frame, *Van Til: The Theologian* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Pilgrim, 1976), 25; quoted in Harvie Conn, “The Missionary Task of Theology,” *WTJ* 45 (1983): 16.

We should be thinking about this not only with regard to our individual instruction, but we should also think “outside the box” in how we can work together as faculty. The name of the article by Edward Farley that I referred to in the introduction is “Why Seminaries Don’t Change: A Reflection on Faculty Specialization.”⁴⁷ He writes:

To the extent that seminaries imitate what American higher education expects of faculty members, they will require that faculty members be scholar teachers within the parameters of a specialized field, such as social ethics, or New Testament, or American religious history. Tenure and promotion depend on accomplishments within this specialized field. Standards for achievement originate in and are maintained by the field itself, operating as a guild of cooperating scholars. Thus, each faculty member represents a field using a special discourse, working within certain methods, and giving priority to certain issues.⁴⁸

Farley continues,

Specialization unavoidably inculcates a “hermeneutic of suspicion” toward other fields. Other fields are suspect both because their contents and methods differ, sometimes radically, from those of one’s own field and because threatening

⁴⁷ Edward Farley, “Why Seminaries Don’t Change: A Reflection on Faculty Specialization,” *ChrCent* 114 (February 5-12, 1997): 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 137.

political possibilities reside in this difference. Different fields have different paradigms of knowledge, research and interpretation. Since people believe that their own paradigm properly expresses genuine scholarship, they tend to see other paradigms as dilutions and possibly even betrayals of scholarship. And they know that people in other fields view them with similar suspicion. The feeling that other faculty members do not understand or fully appreciate one's field and work is common. This suspicion, which taints faculty relations, spawns a second suspicion—of any and all potential leaders, administrative or otherwise. Deans, department chairs and ad hoc committee chairs are by definition oriented to broader agendas and operate under broader criteria than those of one specialty field. This concern for a broader welfare relativizes specialty fields and is, thus, suspect.⁴⁹

What are we to do with this? Of course, it is important for us to work in our areas of specialization, but in the seminary we must remind ourselves and one another that we are working *together* toward a common goal. Ah, it's back to the mission again. Are there practical ways that our *partnership* as faculty members around the mission can be reinforced so that we are more than loosely associated "specialists" who produce our piece of scholarship and hope that somehow all of the pieces of the puzzle will fit together into something that resembles a pastor?

⁴⁹ Ibid., 139.

An important development here in recent years has been the collaboration of the departments of biblical studies and practical theology on preaching courses. These courses have brought faculty from these two departments together with students to teach courses in preaching from the different genres of the Bible.⁵⁰ Perhaps it would be good to think creatively of other collaborations between departments to help our students make important connections and applications.

Another reminder to us as faculty members is that it is not only what we teach that helps prepare students for ministry, but “who we are.” We serve as models to those whom we teach. This is emphasized in the concluding words of one of the core values of the seminary to which I referred earlier: “A learned ministry set in the lifestyle of humble and ‘holy affection’ for Jesus Christ is essential in today’s church and world *and must be modeled by the board, administration, faculty, and students*” (emphasis added). If our goal is merely the transmission of information rather than the transformation of character, perhaps we could squeak by with less, but this is not the case. We must pray that, through the power of the Spirit, we will be models of love for God and for one another. Why is this so important? According to a study by the Duke Divinity School, funded by the Lilly Foundation and published in a book entitled *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry*, one of the most common reasons that Protestant pastors

⁵⁰ There have been three such courses in collaboration with the OT department (Preaching from the Psalms, Preaching from OT Narrative, and Preaching from the Prophets) and one course with the NT Department (Preaching from James).

leave the parish ministry is the experience of troublesome conflict.⁵¹ Of particular interest (and alarm) is this finding: “When comparing the five denominations in our study, we found Presbyterian pastors had higher rates of conflict with their congregations . . . and, of the seven main reasons for leaving, this type of conflict was number one in frequency among Presbyterians.”⁵² The researchers did not have any information that gave definitive answers as to why this was a particular problem among the Presbyterians. But if we adopted Frame’s concept of theological education in a Christian community in which “teachers, ministerial candidates, and their families live together, eat together, work together,” would our students be taking a model of healthy relationships with them into ministry or something less? There is certainly some truth to Robert Banks’s concern that “our effectiveness as teachers flows ultimately from who we are and how we relate as much as by what we do. Unless animated by, and visibly expressing, the faith, love, and hope that make our efforts effective, we do not achieve much in the classroom that endures.”⁵³

IV. CONCLUSION

⁵¹ Dean Hoge and Jacqueline Wenger, *Pastors in Transition: Why Clergy Leave Local Church Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 39. In identifying reasons for leaving a local church 27 percent indicated “conflict” of one kind or another, and tied with 27 percent was “preference for another kind of ministry.”

⁵² *Ibid.*, 77.

⁵³ Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 170.

Is the seminary a place to prepare pastors? Is Westminster Seminary an effective place to prepare pastors? By the grace of God, I believe that the answer is “yes,” and I would humbly say that Westminster has continued to seek to provide, as our founders said, a “complete and symmetrical training for the gospel ministry.” However, it is crucial that the four imperatives outlined in this address be enthusiastically embraced if this, or any seminary, is to grow in its effectiveness in nurturing those who will shepherd God’s flock. After all, the word “seminary” comes from a Middle English root meaning “seedbed.”⁵⁴ A seedbed is a place where a seed grows and is nurtured. While it is ultimately the Good Shepherd who calls and equips his undershepherds, we must take seriously the responsibility to be his servants in helping to prepare them for their lofty calling so that on that day when the Chief Shepherd appears, they “will receive the unfading crown of glory” (1 Pet 5:4).

⁵⁴ *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, <http://www.m-w.com/>.

how does Seminary prepare one for Ministry? Notes. This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17 U.S. Code). Addeddate. 2020-01-13 03:28:29. Artist. Dr. Tim Witmer. Identifier. podcast_practical-theology_seminary-a-place-to-prepare_1000411448569. Keywords. episode podcast itunes apple. Podcast. Practical Theology. Podcast_url. <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/practical-theology/id430335886>. Welcome to Pastoral Training Seminary, Goa. Residential Master's of Divinity Programme. Faculty. We have a rotating roster of visiting faculty of seasoned pastors and professors. Visiting faculty instruction is focused on in depth exposition of Old and New Testament books, with an emphasis on preaching them in one's pulpit ministry. Read More ». Practical Service. PTS students will also be required to take initiative to become involved in practical ministry and service within local churches. This is an integral part of the training of PTS. Read More ». Excellence. PTS holds students to a very high standard. Training for pastoral ministry and preaching is essentially vocational. Practical experience is therefore an important and integral component of the course at London Seminary. All students are placed with a mentoring church, which could be the student's home church or a church near our campus. The mentoring church will provide a local church home for the student and any family he has. In addition to summative assessment and preaching opportunities inside and outside the Seminary, students are expected to prepare thoroughly for lectures by reading texts set by the lecturers. Appraisal. Throughout the course, students participate in an appraisal process designed to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to develop skills relevant to the Christian ministry. Commencement Seminar Lecture by Dr. Timothy Z. Witmer. podcast_commcement-addresses_seminary-a-place-to-prepare-p_1000411466440. Keywords. episode podcast itunes apple. Podcast. Commencement Addresses. Podcast_url. <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/commencement-addresses/id430334890>.