

## **SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: *A Survey of the Literature***

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*Pastoral training has been increasingly influenced by the world of academia which demands high standards of scholarship in pastoral training institutions. What suffers is the development of pastoral skills and spiritual formation. Without spiritual formation of students all else is in vain. For a brilliant theologian with impressive skills of communication is a disaster without a mature spiritual life.*

*Richard Steubing's pioneering D.Min. project assessed programmes for spiritual formation at five selected theological colleges in Africa. The entire study, from which this article is taken, has just been published under the title, **Training for Godliness in African Theological Education**, and may be ordered at US\$5 per copy (surface posting included) from: ACTEA Monographs, PO Box 250100, Ndola, Zambia (make cheques payable to "ACTEA").*

In recent years an extensive ongoing discussion has developed on spiritual formation<sup>1</sup> in theological education. The discussion arises from a widely-shared concern that theological education should focus much more deliberately on aspects of leadership development that transcend mere academic preparation. An overview of the literature on this theme can furnish useful orientation for ongoing attention to this critical need within contemporary

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<sup>1</sup> Generally, the term *spiritual formation* is to be preferred to more general terms such as character development or moral development, which can also be used in a merely secular sense.

theological education.<sup>2</sup>

## THE NEED FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

What is meant by spiritual formation? A World Council of Churches publication defines spiritual formation as “the intentional processes by which the marks of an authentic Christian spirituality are formed and integrated” (Amirtham and Pryor, n.d., p. 157).<sup>3</sup> Such spirituality must always be both “God-centred and earth-based” (p. 153). This definition is helpful for two reasons. First, it indicates that Christian spirituality involves certain processes (such as whether spiritual formation of theological students should be the responsibility of a specialist or of the teaching staff as a whole). Secondly, it indicates that Christian spirituality that is truly authentic must be integrated into the lives of the students and faculty, and thus be observable, whether that be in the classroom, the dormitory or the church.

Some of the most significant literature in the study of spiritual formation in theological education has been published in *Theological Education*, the journal of the Association of Theological Schools based in North America (hereafter ATS). The foundational study was completed in 1972 and presented as *Voyage-Vision-Venture: A Report by the Task Force on Spiritual Development*. The opening sentence noted: “For a number of years the Executive Committee of the American Association of Theological Schools have shared with the staff the conviction that a priority issue of major dimensions is that of the spiritual development of persons preparing for ministry.” The report continued, “Those sent out to be preachers, teachers and church leaders should not only know about the eternal God but . . . should know firsthand the One to whom the scriptures bear witness” (Babin, 1972, p. 1).

The next major study of spiritual formation emanating from ATS was done by Tilden Edwards in 1979/80 and published in *Theological Education* in 1980 as “Spiritual Formation in Theological Schools”. The concerns expressed

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<sup>2</sup> The literature here reviewed is primarily concerned with Protestant sources, since the five institutions under consideration are all evangelical Protestant. Roman Catholicism is rich in literature on spiritual formation, both individual and corporate. For a helpful annotated bibliography of such material, see Amirtham and Pryor, eds. (n.d.), p. 183ff. For a recent evangelical review of spirituality, see Parker (1992).

<sup>3</sup> Although no date of publication is given, references are made in the preface (p. vi) to a 1988 conference and a 1989 publication.

in 1972 were still evident at regional conferences and were summarised by Edwards: "A number of participants note the serious problem of attending spiritual development amidst the great academic pressures put on students by most curricula, which tend to choke out or remove to the periphery serious concern for an integral faith life" (p. 15).

Then a conference on spiritual formation in July 1987 resulted in a number of articles in *Theological Education*, including a special supplementary issue in 1988 that published the conference papers. Forster Freeman (1987, p. 44f) quoted both the 1972 and the 1980 studies in his article entitled, "Spiritual Direction for Seminarians", in which he summarised his Doctor of Ministry studies. In the same supplementary issue, Robert Meye began his conference paper with, "We have long since learned that it is one thing to know the good, and another to perform it. We have that experience in theological education..." (1988, p. 97).

Outside of ATS circles the concern has been the same. Terry Hulbert (1988), of Columbia International University, noted that "in a recent meeting of the deans of thirteen leading evangelical seminaries in the United States, the subject which elicited the greatest concern and lengthiest discussion was the quality of the spiritual life of our students and ways in which we could help them grow" (p. 38).

What should be done? Recognition of the need is not the same as a solution of the problem. Much of the recent literature on the subject of spiritual formation has to do with defining terminology and even discussing the wisdom of trying to solve the problem at all. George Lindbeck (1988) noted that the present generation of theological students does not have the spiritual background of biblical knowledge and prayer that could be assumed in earlier days; today a seminary student's "meditation" might not even be Christian.<sup>4</sup>

Douglas John Hall (1988) agreed that there was a problem, but he doubted that the seminary was capable of solving it. He argued that true spiritual formation is the losing of one's self: Faith should look outward, hope should defy appearances, and love should serve, so it is self-defeating to place the emphasis on personal spiritual development. He summarised his argument as follows: If we belong to a faith-tradition which assumes that spiritual authenticity is a by-product of the loss of self in the contemplation, love and service of 'the other'—and I think that we do!—then it will not remedy the lack of

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<sup>4</sup> Lindbeck thought that even non-Christian meditation had benefits for theological students.

such spirituality to focus everyone's attention all the more on the self and its 'formation' (p. 58).

Throughout his article he showed such a great fear of excessive individualism that any personal relationship with God was in danger of being lost. He preferred using the word discipleship, because of its corporate emphasis, rather than spiritual formation. His definition of God ("that ecological reality behind and in and working through all of life and history") was followed by his concern that "since we humans now have the power to destroy human life on earth completely, what we do can have disastrous consequences for the divine life itself" (1988, p.77). If God's human creation is really capable of destroying God himself, then Hall's pantheistic God bears little resemblance to the omnipotent God of Scripture, the personal God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is therefore not surprising that Hall found difficulty in developing a personal relationship with such a God.

Most writers, however, assumed with Babin (1972) that it is possible to "know firsthand the One to whom the scriptures bear witness" and did not avoid the word, "spiritual," in reaction to the occasional extremes of evangelical individualism. Meye (1988) noted that character and spirituality are virtually synonymous anyway; both can be thought of as what we do and who we are (p. 107). Richard Gross, in one of his final addresses to the faculty before retiring as the president of Gordon College in 1992, took the greatest issue with Hall's approach to the spiritual formation of students when he said:

We need to be direct, even confrontational, with students regarding their spiritual development. We need to mentor and actively discipline them; we need to exhort them, to challenge them, to encourage and nurture them in an unapologetic way. Students expect that from us. We need to impart to them not just academic knowledge but spiritual wisdom and understanding (1991, p. 11).

The need for spiritual formation in theological education is clearly present, but how to meet that need is still a matter of debate. One factor in the debate is the differing models of theological education that have arisen over the years and their implications for the task of spiritual formation.

## **MODELS FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

Jane Smith (1988) expressed the concerns of many theological educators when she wrote, "Certainly a solid and persuasive case can be made for the way in which theology and spirituality became separated in the Christian tradition" (p. 87). James Hcpewell (1984) believed that such problems arose

when theology became an “academic analysis of God”, rather than a personal knowledge of Him, because theology had to legitimate its university status (p. 62). In his summary of “Spiritual Formation in the Seminary”, Carl Lundquist (n. d.) warned that the classical academic tradition, which has become the model for most seminaries, generally ignores the personal life of the student.

Harvey Conn (1980) suggested that there have basically been two models throughout history, the pedagogue and alternate forms. The earlier biblical model of building one another up (Rom. 15:2) through love (1 Cor. 8:1) gave way to schooling and an intellectual defense of the gospel. Despite gains made during the monastic movement and the Reformation, secular values remained a strong influence, and “the teacher-student relationship moved from that of brother to that of father-son, from fraternal to paternalistic. Measurements were taken in terms of cognitive input rather than ministerial gifts” (p. 328).

Robert Ferris (1979) made two categories out of Conn’s pedagogue model, both being dependent on the teacher. The first one is the *pastor = knower model*, which claims that “it is the responsibility of the seminary faculty to identify what pastors need to know and to determine how that information can best be organised and communicated. When students are able to demonstrate that they know, they are prepared to enter the ministry” (p. 1). The second is the *pastor = doer model*, which claims that “it is the responsibility of the faculty to identify those skills which are required for effective ministry and to determine how those skills can best be developed by individual students. When students are able to demonstrate proficiency in prescribed skills, they are prepared to enter the ministry.” Ferris prefers the *pastor = helper model*, in which he integrates an emphasis on spiritual gifts and “helpfulness” into the training programme itself.

Is spiritual formation automatic? Despite the difficulty in defining spiritual formation in an objective or measurable sense,<sup>5</sup> most writers agreed that ignoring it will not make the problem go away. Babin wrote:

There is no question of the involvement of the seminary in the process of helping a student to grow in faith and grace. This is the very purpose of its existence. . . . Since the very being a Christian implies becoming a better Christian, the student is involved in a process of growth; and a clear obligation, by the very nature of its stance as theological,

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<sup>5</sup> See Nicholls’ comment: “A degree of subjectivity cannot be eliminated in evaluating spiritual development any more than it can be from the system of written examinations” (1995, p. 236).

falls upon the seminary to assist in this process (1972, p.11).

John Ochola's contribution to the debate underlined a similar concern from an African perspective: "Theological education by its very nature must be spiritual, internal, practical and vocational" (1989, p. 19). And Ken Gnanakan (1989), writing from an Asian perspective, added: A renewal in theological education must . . . aim for spiritual standards which may not be accreditable by secular standards. There is an urgent need for theological educators to develop criteria in accreditation that will measure how far theology is having its desired effect on the learner (in Youngblood, p. 49).

Clark Gilpin, in his editorial introduction to the special July 1987 edition of *Theological Education*, insisted that: "Formation will occur, if not by design then by the influence of implicit, unobserved, or unacknowledged norms" (p. 7). Edwards summarised a 1987 paper by Daniel Buechlein that made the same point:

Spiritual formation cannot be left to chance, any more than the pastoral or strictly academic components of ministerial formation. . . . The role of faculty, staff and students in spiritual formation is inevitable and reciprocal (whether intentional or not). It cannot be merely a task assigned as a separate program to special staff (p. 37).

Edwards' 1979/80 study found greater commitment to spiritual formation in evangelical schools, but there was still some disagreement about its place on campus. "Though an evangelical faculty seems to most consistently value attention to this nurture, some schools view this as the responsibility of the local church and denomination" (1980, p. 24). Thus, in the minds of some evangelical faculty members, the primary concern on campus remains academic and professional, not spiritual. Therefore, the concern to balance academic and spiritual objectives begs an examination of the difference between secular and theological education, another topic that many writers have debated in print.

## **DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SECULAR AND THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

### **The Dangers of Academia**

Babin and his colleagues raised the question in 1972 when they asked if a seminary should be either a professional training school or a graduate school for training in theology. Their conclusion was that it should be neither, because a seminary's primary commitment should be to Christ, not to training or education. It is this commitment that should distinguish a seminary from a

university department of religion (p. 8), but the authors noted that not all students or staff shared this commitment. In light of this concern, it is interesting to note Dan Hoffman's observation that church leaders in Zambia were lukewarm about establishing a department of religion at the University of Zambia, partly because it was felt that "the churches' priority . . . should be pastoral formation rather than classical academic theology" (1982, p. 242).<sup>6</sup>

Lindbeck (1988) spoke for those who are concerned that the spiritual will undermine the academic: "Ours is a society which values academic credentials and respectability. . . . Our seminaries must conform to the general standards of what passes for responsible education or they will lose students and faculty" (p. 25). Freeman, on the other hand, cautioned against Lindbeck's position by quoting W. Robert Martin, Jr.:

The sad fact [is] that many faculty and some administrators have indeed become preoccupied with looking good in the eyes of the secular academy, and in the process have clearly forgotten why their schools exist and to whom they really belong in the best sense of that word (1987, p. 46).

Ochola's concern was similar to Martin's:

Theological education must give spiritual connotation to knowledge and its application. The extremes of intellectualism dangerously influencing the development of spiritual life as an ideal must be curbed. Thinking in terms of traditional academic patterns and standards of cognitive knowledge is not enough. Knowledge must be approached in terms of a virile service to God (1989, p. 19).

A. D. Solanky added his support from his Asian experience:

What we need is not just innovations or better methods but a radical change in our concept of education: learning as experience, versus gathering content, a body of information. We must treat our students as persons, not as boxes to be filled little by little, with little, logically arranged, packets of information. We must expect them to develop abilities, to grow in the experience of the Lord (II Peter 3:18) (1978, p. 133).

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<sup>6</sup> As one who is acquainted with recent discussions between the Theological Association of Zambia and UNZA, I can confirm the continuing accuracy of such sentiments.

The ICETE<sup>7</sup> *Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education* (1990) also deals with the problem of balancing academic and non-academic concerns in section 7 ("Integrated Programme"):

Our programmes of theological education must combine spiritual and practical with academic objectives in one holistic integrated educational approach. We are at fault that we so often focus educational requirements so narrowly on cognitive attainments, while we hope for student growth in other dimensions but leave it largely to chance. Our programmes must be designed to attend to the growth and equipping of the whole man of God. This means, firstly, that our educational programmes must deliberately foster the spiritual formation of the student. . . . We must devote as much time and care and structural designing to facilitate this type of growth as we readily and rightly provide for cognitive growth.

### **Distinctives of Theological Education.**

Hulbert outlined five distinctives of theological education, as contrasted with secular education (1988, p. 30f):

1. **Responsibility to God.** We should respond first to the commands of God, not to the marketplace or to the value system of society.
2. **Eternal significance.** "The results of our teaching, whether excellent or mediocre, are permanent."
3. **Absolute truth.** (It is not determined, but discovered). We must "guard against a modern Pharisaism which would emphasise the theological accretions of scholars more than the Word of God itself."
4. **Spiritual dynamic.** This is "not a substitute for diligence but an added factor which affects the reason for and results of learning. . . . Without spiritual formation of the student, theological education differs from secular education mainly in subject matter."

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<sup>7</sup> ICETE (the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education) is a community sponsored by the World Evangelical Fellowship that links continental associations of evangelical theological schools world-wide. Until 1996 this body was known as ICAA.



**5. Centrality of the church.** Theological institutions exist in order to serve the churches and must therefore be accountable to them.

Gross outlined his vision of Christian education under seven basic beliefs, which are similar to Hulbert's. Then he continued:

We may graduate students who are intellectually elite, highly motivated academically, prepared for the best graduate schools and successful once there. But if their hearts are not inclined to God, we have failed to realise our vision (1992, p. 11).

Church-based theological education? One result of the debate over secular education versus theological education is a suggested change of emphasis in the latter. With the fear that theological education is becoming increasingly isolated from local churches, some educators have urged that the local church become the focus of students' training for ministry. Most seminaries include some kind of field-based education that involves spiritual formation, but some writers call for a much greater involvement with the church than the traditional several hours per week.

Jeff Reed (1992) noted that the Pastoral Epistles stress training in the context of ministry, so models for leadership training should be church-based. James Hopewell (1984) offered a detailed argument for such a change when he claimed that the present paradigm which governs the activity of a seminary "centres upon the idea of a student who undergoes cognitive and characterological development deemed advantageous for Christian ministry." That should be replaced by "cognitive and characterological development of the local church" (p. 60). In revising the curriculum, the "primary object of the program would be the development of the congregation, not the student" (p. 63). The advantage of such a programme is that:

the seminary is not permitted merely to prepare the individual who might later guide the local church in the quest [for a redemptive community], nor is the local church allowed to assign its own responsibility for the quest to a clergyman so prepared (p. 64). The emphasis would be on the seminary and local church working together in the preparation of the Christian minister.<sup>8</sup>

Tim Dearborn's 1994 survey regarding the qualities of a good pastor found major differences among the laity, the pastors and seminary professors.

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<sup>8</sup> Also see Wilson Chow (1995: p. 223ff) for summaries of John Frame's "Proposals for a New Seminary" and what Jonathan Chao calls "shepherd formation."

Church members ranked spirituality as the most important quality and character third; pastors ranked spirituality fourth (character was unranked), and professors ranked character second (spirituality was unranked). Therefore, one must ask whether the priorities of our theological institutions are similar to the priorities of the churches being served.

*The Manifesto* also noted this concern (Section 2, "Churchward Orientation"):

Our programmes of theological education must orient themselves persuasively in terms of the Christian community being served. We are at fault when our programmes operate merely in terms of some traditional or personal notion of theological education. At every level of design and operation our programmes must be visibly determined by a close attentiveness to the needs and expectations of the Christian community we serve. To this end we must establish multiple modes of ongoing interaction between programme and church, both at official and at grassroots levels, and regularly adjust and develop the programme in the light of these contacts.

## THE ROLE OF THE TEACHING STAFF

### ATS Standards for Faculty

The accreditation standards of the ATS have clear expectations for faculty members in the area of spiritual formation, and it is helpful to note some of them at this point (cf. Meye, 1988, p. 116f):

[in addition to] "moral, religious and intellectual depth, excellence in teaching and concern for ministry should characterise the members of the theological faculty."

"the work load of the faculty members shall permit attention to students."  
"programs [must] include adequate counselling, personal and spiritual, as well as academic."

"Members of the faculty shall be ready to minister to the students in their personal/spiritual development."

Meye (1988) went on to list assumptions that he considered to be "more or less explicit" (p. 118) in the current standards. They include "character formation is important for ministry" and "the faculty must be characterised by moral depth and a deep understanding of the heritage of faith giving birth to

schools' commitments." Then under "implicit" standards (p. 118f) he included, "Faculty have a modelling responsibility."

### **ACTEA Standards for Teaching Staff**

The Standards of ACTEA<sup>9</sup> include similar requirements. Thus the "Teaching Staff" section requires lecturers to have "an active participation in the life and worship of the institution, and a visible personal interest in the students and their welfare" (2c, p. 6). The educational plan must embrace a concern "for the students' spiritual and vocational as well as academic development" (4a, p. 7).

Section 6 of the Manifesto ("Community Life") states:

Our programmes of theological education must demonstrate the Christian pattern of community. We are at fault that our programmes so often seem little more than Christian academic factories, efficiently producing graduates. It is biblically incumbent on us that our programmes function as deliberately nurtured Christian educational communities, sustained by those modes of community that are biblically commended and culturally appropriate. To this end it is not merely decorative but biblically essential that the whole educational body—staff and students—not only learns together, but plays and eats and cares and worships and works together.

Therefore the problem is not one of omission in the area of standards. Hulbert's assertion is more likely: "Although spiritual formation is usually included in Christian accreditation standards, it is not always evaluated or emphasised as realistically as other criteria" (1988, p. 39). Alan Chilver's questions (1990) demand answers: "What do students learn spiritually from what we teach? And from how we teach?" (p. 8). One wonders how many faculty members at theological institutions have been reprimanded or dismissed for failing to be involved sufficiently in the spiritual formation of their students!

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<sup>9</sup> ACTEA (the Accrediting Council for Theological Education in Africa) is a ministry of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa (AEA) that provides networking and support services (including academic accreditation) for theological schools in Africa.

### **Selection of the Faculty**

Having established that accreditation standards underline the critical role that faculty play in the spiritual formation of students, such an emphasis must be seen in the actual hiring practices of theological institutions. Faculty members must meet certain academic qualifications in order for accreditation standards to be met, but this is not to be at the expense of spiritual concerns. Babin summarised his team's findings by noting:

We have hesitated to mention particular persons who have been successful, or programs of particular institutions we have found valuable, but we can say that the only ingredient we did find in all successes was a dedicated faculty, giving of themselves to help those who would soon be their ministerial colleagues (1972, p. 43).

### **Spiritual Qualifications of Faculty**

Hulbert brought the subject back to the difference between secular and theological education: "The selection of godly faculty and the monitoring of their spiritual development and their impact on students must take precedence over any kind of academic criteria if theological education is to differ from that which is secular" (1988, p. 39). In an interesting affirmation of Hulbert's position, Ferris used Hulbert's own institution (Columbia International University) as one of his case studies and cited it as an example of good objectives in the hiring of faculty:

It is also clear that careful selection of personnel is the key to preserving institutional values and achieving training objectives. Many administrators have had occasion to regret staffing decisions which focused too narrowly on technical qualifications. . . . the modeling effect of an institution's chief executive officer and faculty shapes the administrative and instructional context which guides the life of the school (1990, p. 77).

One result of Dearborn's study of co-operative, church-based theological education was a prioritised list of ten qualities of a faculty member for a theological institution (1995, p.10). They are: spirituality (passion for Jesus, personal godliness), vision (ability to inspire and instil vision in others), pastoral gifts and ministry experience, communication ability, scholarship (research, analysis, reflection, publication), servant mentality, personal transparency, love for the church, love of culture, love of diversity among people.

Babin's report dealt with this subject in the context of the institution's goals:

Imagine how the life style of seminaries would be altered if only professors were appointed who possessed spiritual concern if not spiritual charisma, and demonstrated pastoral ability, as well as acknowledged academic competence in their field. By what right is a professor retained on a seminary faculty if he disdains interest in or responsibility for the spiritual growth of students? He may well be a serious impediment to the achievement of the seminary's agreed upon goals (1972, p. 36).

Finally, John Stott underlines the importance of quality leadership in theological institutions (letter to friends, March 1994):

Thus the seminary is the key institution in the church, and seminary teachers are the key personnel, as they influence for good or ill generation after generation of the church's future clergy. What is needed, then, is a steady stream of new faculty members who combine academic excellence with personal godliness.

### **Integration of Spiritual Formation**

Who is responsible? Whereas Hulbert and Babin believe that all faculty members should have responsibility for the spiritual formation of their students, Freeman's conclusion (1987) was somewhat different. He recommended that seminaries obtain the services of a trained spiritual formation team, although the institution could begin with an individual, even on a part-time basis. Eventually more training could be offered in spiritual development, and faculty members could be encouraged to contribute to the renewal of discipline by their research and publishing (p. 55).

Wilson Chow disagreed with Freeman, who seemed to be willing to leave the spiritual formation of students to specialists in the field. Chow asserted:

Wholeness and integration ought to be demonstrated by the faculty. This relates to the example of the faculty members individually, as well as the witness of the faculty as a team. Very often the presence of faculty members each with his own specialised field of study only results in polarisation. But the students want to learn from their teachers by way of hearing and seeing (in Bowers, 1982a, p. 56f).

Alan Chilver addressed this concern in the context of his long experience in African theological education, stressing the necessity of presenting "every man mature in Christ" (Col. 1:28). His answer to the question, "Can spirituality be taught?" is "Yes! That's what theology is all about" (1990, p.7). Mark Olander, whose Doctor of Education thesis arose from a similar context in Kenya, found that the spiritual competency of theological lecturers was an essential factor in effective classroom teaching (1993, p. 112).

Amirtham and Pryor (n. d., p. 160) also put strong emphasis on the corporate nature of the problem being addressed:

Spiritual formation is seen as an important task of the whole faculty. The atmosphere, relationships, life-styles and courses, all have a bearing on it. This calls for an intentional integration, and a common understanding of the purpose of theological education among the various disciplines and departments. . . . The delegation of spiritual formation to just one department does not solve the problem though in practical theology or pastoral theology there are special resources and sometimes better pre-conditions for promoting spiritual development.

Both Wilson Chow and Bruce Nicholls, in a recent (1995) issue of *Evangelical Review of Theology* dedicated to the topic of "Excellence in Theological Education", supported integration for similar reasons:

Integration, furthermore, is not an attempt to maintain a balance between the academic, the spiritual, and the practical, as though things were done one at a time. Integration means bringing these aspects together into a whole, and doing them at the same time (Chow, p. 221).

Spiritual development cannot be merely a subject within theological education, separate from other subjects. Rather it must be a perspective affecting the whole educative process (Nicholls, p. 231).

### **The Matter of Evaluation**

If faculty members who are to be hired must have a commitment to the spiritual development of both themselves and their students, the question of evaluation of faculty (and students) then arises. How should such a commitment be measured? Daniel Aleshire (1985) has written a valuable article on the subject of evaluation, examining reasons for resistance to evaluation, especially from the faculty, and going on to suggest practical ways in which good evaluation procedures can be implemented. Few readers would dispute the

accuracy of his general rule: "Nobody wants to be evaluated, but everybody wants somebody else evaluated" (p. 71).

**Reasons for resistance to evaluation.** Aleshire stated that the main reason for opposition to evaluation is fear, whatever evaluative techniques are used. People can feel threatened, and personal identities may be at stake, even when good techniques are used ("Bad news from a credible source is much more threatening than bad news from a source easily discredited", 1985, p.72). Therefore the emphasis should be on what he calls *formative evaluation* (which is concerned with development and guidance) rather than *summative evaluation* (which is concerned with judgement, such as a student's grade being based solely on a final exam). The latter brings confrontation and tension, but formative evaluation "has a way of getting issues into the open, helping persons identify directions, and providing counsel rather than judgement" (p. 73). Benefits of formative evaluation include feedback, guidance (such as becoming a more effective classroom teacher or administrator) and both personal and institutional long-term development (p. 74).

Aleshire also dealt with several possible problems in a forthright manner. In a community where some work better or contribute more in other ways, he wrote: "It is certainly arguable that such distinctions can be made and a community spirit prevail, but many will assume that such distinctions among people will threaten the chances for community" (p. 76). In a theological institution where there is high value placed on academic pursuit and individuality, evaluation may be seen as an attempt to create uniformity at the expense of individual gifts being exercised. Lastly, it is difficult to evaluate different gifts with one method since an effective lecturer may not be as good at writing or at public ministry. He summarised by stating: "Evaluation of people must be sensitive to variables in the institutional setting, and be implemented in ways that insure fairness, consistency of application and disciplined use of resulting information" (p. 90).

**A method of evaluation for the faculty.** He suggested that a committee of professors, students and administrative personnel be used to evaluate faculty members. Their job would be to suggest strengths, weaknesses and future goals. Then the same committee would interview faculty colleagues, students and members of the administration, for purposes of comparison. The final stage would be the preparation of a written summary, although the faculty member so examined could always request a discussion of the findings.

### **The Critical Role of the Faculty**

Babin's team frequently underlined the essential role played by the faculty. Their first principle is, "The spiritual formation and development of seminary students begins with, and is dependent upon, the spiritual formation and development of the faculty." The report continued:

If a seminary is to take seriously its obligation to evangelise the students, to witness to the breaking in of the Kingdom, to celebrate the freedom of the Spirit that accompanies obedience to God—if it is to do these things, then it must be the faculty, as men and women in Christ, who do it. It cannot be done by curriculum revision, student evaluations, or reorganisation of the board of trustees—although all of these things play an important role in aiding or hindering the faculty in their job (1972, p. 9).

Later in the report Babin and his colleagues made their point even stronger: "If any one thing has emerged from our study of seminaries, it is the conviction that the spiritual development and formation of students begins with and depends on the spirituality of the faculty" (p. 27).

One of the most helpful sections of the book by Amirtham and Pryor (n. d.) is entitled, "Curriculum for Spiritual Formation" (p. 88ff), which listed a number of questions that are pertinent here. The following questions were under "The Seminary Ethos":

Do student-faculty relations have the characteristics of "spiritually forming" leaders?

Do faculty, staff and students volunteer to "bear one another's burdens", or do they only work when paid? Does the seminary seek to be a caring, compassionate community?

Are members of the community honest, repentant and appropriately humorous about discrepancies in their theological rhetoric and behaviour?

Are the leaders of the seminary (faculty, administration) the first to practice and model principles of spiritual integrity?



Then the following suggestions were listed under "The Faculty Vocation", noting that faculty members should:

1. Have some extended experience of ministry as helpers in the spiritual formation of others.
2. Be committed to the school as community and not only to the discipline as a profession.
3. Have a sense of the connections of the intellectual, professional and spiritual dimensions of theological education.
4. Be ready to participate in opportunities for spiritual formation of themselves and students.
5. Be open to dialogical learning, team-teaching and student participation in the teaching-learning process.

**Student evaluation.** Lest their fellow professors feel that the emphasis on responsibility and evaluation was falling too heavily upon the faculty, Babin's team dealt with the importance of student evaluation as well:

If faculty are to be evaluated . . . , then it follows that students should be carefully evaluated as well. What makes us assume that it is easier to give course grades that accurately reflect growth and awareness than to disclose to students how their spiritual maturity is perceived by others? Neither is easy, nor can the claim be sustained that the evaluations in either case are 100% accurate. Yet we regularly persist in doing the one, and all but totally neglect the other (1972, p. 36).

The report continued:

Surely the people of God have a right to expect that the persons to whom positions of leadership are entrusted (whether ordination is involved or not) will have a lively and vibrant spirituality . . . . The faculty must know the students, have an established set of standards, and be able to evaluate the students in light of those standards. This is not a fearsome thing, as though the faculty took delight in building barriers or thought of themselves as guardians of a gate through which only the perfect could pass. It is rather an aid to the student who can see himself as others see him, can determine progress made or ground lost, can see what needs to be done. The advantage of the regular evaluation by the faculty, aided often by the student's peers and hopefully by the laity as well, is that corrective action, if needed, takes place before it affects the active ministry, before a congregation is less effectively served, before trends have hardened into habits (1972, p. 37).

Aleshire (1985) added that grades alone are insufficient for the evaluation of theological students. "Grades for students should be supplemented by other evaluative measures. These may include rating forms completed by persons in ministry settings and essay evaluations written by professors" (p. 87). Both Chow and Nicholls, in articles already noted (1995), suggested adding student self-evaluation forms to other input from teaching staff, counsellors and the student's local ministry supervisor(s). Combining such information should help to form a reasonably accurate assessment of the student's spiritual development in a way that is both "observable and communicable" (Chow, p. 221).

### **BALANCING ACADEMIC AND SPIRITUAL CONCERNS**

Smith (1988) posed the question in the minds of many theological educators when she wrote, "If we offer courses in spirituality, how can we avoid sliding from the academically acceptable into a kind of substanceless meandering into that which is personally 'meaningful' but intellectually indefensible?" (p. 82). Authors went their separate ways on this question, some urging greater integration and others doing the opposite.

Ferris (1979) believed that the problem was mainly one of recognising what has been effective in the past and implementing this knowledge at the seminary: "Seminaries have long recognised that the development of spiritual gifts and a spirit of helpfulness is important for effectiveness in pastoral ministry, but few have ever made the development of these qualities the integrative focus of the training program" (p. 7). His pastor = helper model would use this approach, taking the best of other programmes that stress the transfer of information and the development of skills, but putting more emphasis on the helping aspect.

George Schner's concern was that students end up being internally divided when there is a false division between the academic and the spiritual in the curriculum. His solution was that "it is better to conceive of both the academic and the spiritual exercises of the divinity school to be formation, and to seek out the common principles operative in both aspects of the one enterprise" (1985, p. 97). Gilpin agreed that fragmentation is a problem because seminaries are engaged "both in service to the purposes of the church and to the purposes of North American higher education" (1987, p. 6), and that could lead to a conflict between "ministerial education" and graduate "religious studies."

Although it is tempting to defend the seminary's concern for spiritual formation by simply adding courses to the curriculum, Jane Smith was certainly correct when she asserted that "many, if not most of the courses, in our curricula

have the potential of opening doors to new levels of spiritual awareness" (1988, p. 89). Unfortunately, she then went on to oppose the addition of courses in "techniques" of spirituality as unacademic and only accepted courses on the comparative history of the ways in which spirituality has been understood. "Opening doors to new levels of spiritual awareness" can only be effective if there is freedom to practice spirituality, such as praying together about an issue as it arises in class discussion. A mere analysis of spirituality will not meet the objective of deepening the students' spiritual lives.<sup>10</sup>

Even so, there are changes that can be made within courses that are not directly related to spiritual formation. Tite Tiénou (1987) was concerned about "assignment patterns which leave little time for the labour of reflection" and listed it as one of the causes of "theological malaise" in African theological education. Theological educators do their students no favours by assigning so much work that students have little time to meditate on what they have studied.

Classroom attitudes are also important, as Amirtham and Pryor's book noted in a section entitled, "Some Creative Steps in Spiritual Formation":

Spiritual formation will not be on the explicit agenda of many courses . . . because often it is approached more easily indirectly than directly. But in certain ways even the predominant mood, the learning climate and the relationship between teachers and students in any theological course contribute to the overall spiritual formation process. Therefore attention should be given also to the unconscious factors which affect trust and mistrust, openness or closedness (n.d., p. 161).

### **EXTRA-CURRICULAR AREAS**

Although most spiritual formation takes place outside of the classroom, some professors need to be reminded of that fact. Babin asserted that the entire seminary staff should be involved in community prayer and worship because "what faculty and administration do about common worship speaks so loudly the student will hardly hear what they say" (1972, p. 28). This particular point was echoed in the WCC report: "Spiritual formation needs to find expression in a life of common worship, prepared and attended by both students and staff" (Amirtham and Pryor, n. d., p. 160). Ochola (1989) agreed:

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<sup>10</sup> For a good reference on current evangelical thinking on this subject, including a suggested bibliography, see Hingley (1990).

Lively chapel services should be planned and made indispensable for both the staff and students. These activities [should be] viewed as an integral part of a student's education [and] should be executed with initiative expected of the student rather than from administrative coercion (p. 20).

Wilson Chow (1995), writing from an Asian perspective, made the same point as his African colleague:

The chapel time should not be limited to worship or preaching. It can be a very useful meeting to bridge between faculty and students, or to link the seminary to the outside world and the church at large. Mutual sharing of experiences, feelings, viewpoints and areas of concern during chapel times proves a great blessing both to faculty and to students in my school. The otherwise routine daily gatherings, if thoughtfully arranged ahead of time, can become refreshing and edifying moments. They promote fellowship among members in the school.

... Communal activities outside the classroom should be a deliberate part of the program. These include outings, retreats, days of prayer, spiritual-exercises week, and communal meals. Such occasions are necessary to create a solidarity among faculty and students (p. 225).

Faculty involvement with students outside of the classroom can, of course, be limited by time pressures on professors who are writing books or carrying extra administrative or ministerial loads. Watson Omulokoli (1992) feared that such faculty isolation from students could be a detriment to student development:

Once identified, recruited and enlisted in Christian service, those being prepared for theological and ecclesiastical leadership require adequate direction, guidance and moral support at the all-important training stage. ... More often than not, the executors of training schemes are not aware of, let alone involved in, the detailed programme and schedule of the student (p. 20).

In what kinds of activities should faculty and students spend time together? Edwards listed a number of possibilities such as small groups, special days or weeks for consideration of spiritual life, chapel and worship, courses and activities for families, community meals and joint staff/student committees on spiritual life (1980, p. 28ff). Henry Griffith (1988) felt that there was a greater need for more "one to one discipling situations between the teachers and

students. This can best be done during evangelism trips away from campus, but times set aside for prayer and discussion can also be important" (p. 52).

## CONTRIBUTIONS FROM AFRICAN WRITERS

Peter Sarpong, writing as the chairman of the Roman Catholic bishops' conference in Ghana, is one of few African writers who have attempted to contextualize spiritual formation, and he only made brief reference to the issue (1989). He noted that in African traditional religion the priest is to be an embodiment of the divinity, even to the extent of being physically possessed by the spirit of the divinity. The parallel for African Christianity is that theological students should be so "possessed" by the Holy Spirit that their lives show the character of God in their ministry (p. 5).

Tite Tiénou, writing about the challenges facing the African church, included tension between academic and popular theology. Although his main concern was theological, his comments also have relevance for similar tensions in theological education because of his concern for balance between academic and popular theology:

On the evangelical scene, a lot is happening theologically in Africa at the popular level, while little is happening at the academic. The situation is alarming because popular theology is by no means always grounded in and governed by Scripture. The way in which some pastors preach and give counsel may be totally opposed to sound scriptural interpretation.

It may yet prove, however, to be providential that there is a gap between academic and popular theology within African Christianity. For the solution to that situation, I suggest, lies uniquely within the reach of African evangelicals. They are in fact strategically positioned to assume the theological initiative in Africa by implementing a third way in African theology, a way which remains restricted neither to mere scholastic discussions nor to a poorly rooted popular theology (1990, p. 50).

It would appear that African writers are concentrating on the importance of spiritual formation rather than on how to accomplish it in a contextualized sense. Therefore, that is an area where more contributions are needed from African Christians involved in theological education.

The Manifesto, though not specifically an African document, nevertheless emphasises the importance of having contextually relevant theology (Section 1, Contextualization):

Our programmes of theological education must be designed with deliberate reference to the contexts in which they serve. We are at fault that our curricula so often appear either to have been imported whole from abroad, or to have been handed down unaltered from the past. . . . To become familiar with the context in which the biblical message is to be lived and preached is no less vital to a well-rounded programme than to become familiar with the content of that biblical message.

## CONCLUSIONS

The literature reviewed above shows that the spiritual formation of theological students has been a major theme of discussion for theological educators in many parts of the world over the last three decades. Taking account of the range of issues, perspectives, and insights on display in the literature, we may work towards understandings and approaches suitable for our own institutions, in order more faithfully to pursue this essential element for all biblically-informed theological education.

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