Seminary Professors and the Leader-shaping Task: New Wine from Old Wineskins?

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General Colin Powell defined the task of leadership this way: "Great leaders articulate what the mission is—the who, what, when, where, and why."[1] Business guru Peter Drucker likewise made his mark by calling corporations to examine three essential questions: (1) What is our business/mission? (2) Who is our customer? and (3) What does the customer value?

I think that this may be an opportune time to borrow from Drucker and re-examine four basic questions in regard to our task as seminaries, and especially as faculty.

1. What is our business?

2. If our business is shaping effective Christian leaders, what then does one look like?

3. How are Christian leaders shaped?

4. How can seminaries do a better job shaping leaders?

1. What is Our Business?

This first question—What is our business?— has been answered in various ways. Charles Conniry, Jr., writing in the ATS journal, *Theological Education,* describes how theological education has been trapped between two poles, that of the academic extreme, and the practical extreme, neither of which he find to be particularly relevant

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[1] Brian Duffy, "Colin Powell: The Kid of No Promise" Accessed online at http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/leadership/usnews/powell.html on February 23, 2006.

to the living out of one's calling. The former, with its emphasis upon scholarly research and innovation, runs the danger of achieving an ivy-tower disconnect from its students. The latter, the practical extreme, teaches students the tricks and ways of the ministerial trade that exist today, knowledge that may be outdated by the time they reach their ministerial prime.[2]

Variations from these two poles exist as well, representing the agendas of their respective advocates. Some would have ministerial students become proficient at marketing the church to an increasingly disinterested population. The need for intercultural awareness and savvy tops other priority lists. Still others want to insure that we make good evangelists—or should it rather be spiritual care-providers?—out of our students. My own denomination, wants to insure that our graduates are both theologically correct and denominationally loyal. Incoming students also bring their own agenda, often disillusioned when seminary is not filled with riveting spiritual experiences. With so many agendas, what is a seminary to do and to be?

Bill Crews, former president of Golden Gate Baptist Seminary, looked to the Drucker model as he guided that seminary to adopt its current focus on leadership. One might think that Crews would have seen students as the customer. However, he determined that our customers really are the churches. And their call has been clear: send us effective spiritual leaders! Golden Gate thus developed a tag line that called the seminary to the task of *Shaping Effective Leaders for the Churches of Tomorrow*. The next president, Jeff Iorg, in his 2010 Plan, has expanded on this theme to speak more clearly

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[2] Eddie Gibbs writing in *LeadershipNext*, says "The ministry training I received over forty years ago was for a world that now no longer exists, and even at the time it was undergoing radical change. Consequently, the major challenge for leaders is not only the acquisition of new insights and skills but also unlearning what they already know. Today's leaders need the courage and ability to risk their false sense of confidence and to surrender their predetermined, "wired" responses, and outdated and inaccurate mental maps." Eddie Gibbs, *LeadershipNext: Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 9-10. If this is true, what might the seminary's role be in nurturing such qualities?

of context and mission: *Shaping Effective Leaders For the Churches of the West and On Mission to The World*.

All of this emphasis upon leadership, framed within a business terminology, has not come without controversy. One former faculty colleague derided this approach as adopting a sociological model—What does the customer want?—over a theological model; that is, what a minister-in-training most needs.

His is not a solitary voice. In his book, *Working the Angles*, Eugene Peterson makes a scathing analysis of the movement toward marketing and craftsmanship in ministerial training. He speaks of pastors who have gone 'whoring after other gods' – the gods of success and marketing—becoming a company of shopkeepers, instead of sticking to their three-fold primary calling of scripture, prayer, and spiritual direction. He denounces the curriculum of popular workshops 'that trains pastors to satisfy the current consumer tastes in religion'[3]

The assumptions underlying such viewpoints are two-fold: First, that theological mandate, and not marketing factors, should drive the content of a seminary's curriculum. A second assumption, perhaps more quietly held, is that the doctors of the church—the faculty—better know what the student needs than do either the student or the churches.

Frankly, I do not agree that we faculty are always in the position to know what is best. So focused on the theoretical side of our subject area, along with the day-to-day responsibilities of facultydom, we can at times become disengaged from the life of the church and the movement of the Spirit at the leading edges of the Kingdom. This is a very real danger that we as faculty must recognize.

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[3] Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987) 1-2, 8.

If our desire is indeed to shape Christian leaders for the churches of tomorrow—to use a Dr. Phil question—How is that working for us? To find out, we must listen more attentively to those voices at the edge. The Old Testament is replete with examples of prophetic voices crying out unwelcome messages from the wilderness. I have been listening to some of those current voices. Here is some of what I have heard:

- That the seminaries have become irrelevant to the real work of the church.

- That faculty too often focus on scholarship to the detriment of the more important task of assisting students in understanding, preparing for, and living out their calling.

- That the academic model, with its emphasis upon innovation in research, has a built in tendency toward abandonment of the faith once delivered.

- That the typical mode and methods of teaching—content-delivery through lecture, divorced from relationship and modeling---is rejected by a generation of students who are desperately seeking authentic role models.

- That there are better ways for equipping persons for ministry, more of a mentoring, apprenticeship approach where people learn as they do.

Some of these voices crying in the wilderness are certainly more valid than others. I once shared dessert and conversation with a self-taught church planter who, proud of his lack of seminary training, described himself as a Postmodern, Purpose-Driven, Pentecostal pastor. What a fascinating collision of ideologies! Ridiculous, some would say. Yet his church now runs in the thousands, and by most counts, is effecting

transformational change among the predominantly unchurched people of Calgary, Alberta.[4]

Another of the voices at the edge was Kyle Lake. He was the pastor of University Baptist Church in Waco, Texas who unfortunately was electrocuted in 2005 baptizing a recent convert. A few weeks prior to that tragedy, I heard him speak at Catalyst, a two-thousand strong gathering of emerging church leaders in Atlanta. He quoted Garrison Keillor as saying, "Fellows, we need to give up our good Christian lives and start following Jesus." Lake then charged these young leaders to avoid being sucked into merely learning the tricks and techniques of Christian leadership. Instead, they must learn to model an authentic and honest walk of faith before their people.

Here me well. I am not ready to declare seminaries to be a dead relic of the past and shutter their doors. My own seminary, Golden Gate, has listened more carefully than most to the pleas of churches and students. Moreover, seminary education must never become the equivalent of a class-president election, where the most popular trend-of-the-month gets voted in. With so many undercurrents, one needs a rudder to guide the seminary ship.

Rudders, or the lack of them are something with which I have personal experience. Recently, I bought an old river kayak, and tried it out on Richardson Bay, north of San Francisco. The primary difference that I quickly discovered between river kayaks and ocean kayaks, is the lack of a rudder on the former — at least on the old, patched one I had. Buffeted by winds, currents and waves, I found myself spinning around in 360° fashion, thoroughly helpless before the elements.

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[4] Interview with Tom Morris, pastor of Westside King's Church, Calgary, Alberta on November 10, 2003.

A seminary must not be rudderless. B.H. Carroll, first president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary realized that. On his deathbed, gave his famous charge to his successor, L.R. Scarborough: "Lee, keep the seminary lashed to the cross".[5]

I agree that the central message of the gospel—that of Christ crucified for humanity's sins, and raised to usher in eternal life—must remain the essential curriculum of any God-honoring seminary. I am grateful that, when I faced my own theological crisis during seminary in the eighties, it was a Golden Gate Seminary professor and then Academic Dean Bob Cate, who helped me to know how to keep academic integrity in balance with theological orthodoxy.

This discussion must now move beyond the moderate/conservative controversy that has raged on and on in my denomination and in many others. It is far too easy to trade one set of academic answers for another—to move from a cold liberal or moderate orthodoxy to an equally cold conservative orthodoxy that is itself devoid of life and passion. It is not just about having the right answers.

I agree with Crews when he stated that leadership *is* the real issue. However, we must do more than merely providing theory or skills for leadership. We must address head on the total person of the leader as well by embracing new (and yet somehow ancient) ways of shaping people for ministry. We must shape not only the head through academics, and the hand through skills training, but also the heart—the very *identity* of the persons we teach.

The Apostle Peter's admonition applies as well to seminary professors as it did to the ancient pastors when he charged, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those

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[5] from '""Deathbed Commission to his Successor," L.R.Scarborough. Accessed on the Internet at http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/heritage/carroll.asp on February 27, 2006.

entrusted to you, *but being examples to the flock* [italics mine] (1 Pet. 5:2-3).[6] With Peter, we must allow shepherding, character, and modeling to become the primary languages through which we teach our students to incarnate that living message in the churches and on the mission field.

A laser-sharp seminary mission should serve as a rudder to keep us focused on shaping persons, men and women, into proven Christian leaders. Certainly these leaders should learn to rightly interpret the Word of God with a level of excellence that is befitting Holy Scripture. We certainly want no muddle-headed theologies emanating from our seminary. We hope also that our graduates will preach well. But above all else they must *be* leaders, persons capable of being used by God to help churches to fulfill their God-given mission, not just in theory, but also in real time, and often under very trying circumstances.

Never have effective leaders been more needed. According to Randy McWhorter, Church Health Group leader for the California Southern Baptist Convention, 54.6% of all California Southern Baptist churches, at least 1,042, have been plateaued or declining in worship attendance for more than five years.[7] This is only one statistic among countless others across denominations that reflects an increasingly challenging environment for churches and their leaders.

Unless seminaries partner more effectively with our churches to shape effective leaders for the churches of tomorrow, the decades ahead will see a continuing decline of the health and influence of our churches. Without effective leadership, these churches and thousands like them are in danger of becoming nothing more than a sad legacy and a statistic. Courageous Christian leaders with insight and staying power are in desperate need. The mandate is clear.

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[6] All scripture citations are from The New International Version.

[7] Email exchange between Bob Royall and Randy McWhorter on March 1, 2006.

2. What is a Christian Leader?

If leadership of a particular kind—Christian leadership—is what is required, that then leads to another question, "What exactly is a Christian leader?" There is neither time nor space enough in this article to survey the myriad definitions of leadership. I understand Christian leaders to be *persons who embrace the call and shaping influences of God by allowing themselves to be changed, empowered, and used to engage with persons, organizations, and/or cultures to fulfill God's purposes in their particular context.* Let us unpack that definition briefly.

First, they are *Christian leaders*. By this, I mean they are persons whose primary motive in leadership is the fulfillment of Kingdom purposes. This stands in contrast to a leader who merely happens to be a Christian, but whose leadership is exercised for purposes other than the fulfillment of the Kingdom.

These leaders are *persons*. I believe that any man or woman from any station of life has the capacity to be a leader in his or her own right, influencing and impacting others.

Leaders who *embrace the call and shaping influences of God* in their own lives are best able to lead others toward the fulfillment of God's Kingdom purposes. This understanding assumes that God calls all persons to salvation and to some form of Kingdom leadership. God works sovereignly through Scripture, Christian community, and divine guidance, but also through life experiences, both positive and negative, to shape a person's character and to prepare him or her for Kingdom service. One's learning, both formal and informal, along with successes and failures, betrayals and disappointments, circumstances of upbringing--these all become crucibles out of which the character and calling of an emerging leader is forged.

Leader-shaping requires divine initiative**.** There are no self-made Christian leaders. Emerging leaders, through submission to God's activity, are *allowing themselves to be changed, empowered and used*. This understanding recognizes that God who created the individual with a certain set of giftings, is best able to determine the appropriate settings where this person can exert influence. Status and ego-driven efforts are precluded, since God makes the assignments. It also highlights the need for the person to be attuned to the leadership of God in his or her life. Likewise, one does not effectively serve God in one's own strength, or according to one's own agenda. Christian leadership is a leadership that is responsive to the activity and direction of God.

Christian leaders are those who *engage with persons, organizations and/or cultures***.** The best leadership is rarely directive in nature. Rather, effective leadership combines a collaborative style with a mutual respect that calls forth the capabilities of others to accomplish ministry objectives. Such leadership is normally exercised within three arenas: influencing persons, shaping organizations, and/or impacting cultures. An individual may exercise primary influence in one or more, but not always all of these three areas.

The primary objective of Christian leadership is *to fulfill God's purposes*. This is true whether the leader is a mother influencing her child to love God with all of his or her heart, or an executive who guides an organization beyond the financial bottom line toward adopting Kingdom-inspired values.

Leadership in real time requires an application of one's insights within a *particular context,* a specific setting. It calls one to understand both the times and the place in which one ministers. Christian leaders are committed to bridging the gap in their own person between the eternal message they bear and the specific longings of those they seek to reach.

3. How Leaders are Shaped.

Most people intuitively know that leadership is not something that one gets out of a book, nor from a seminary lecture. However, pinpointing what brings leadership into being is a much trickier proposition. It is worth surveying some of the diverse discussions about how people actually become leaders.

One of the points of contention is whether leaders are made or born. The leadership Calvinists would have us believe that leadership qualities are inbred — stamped in the genes, if you will. As one significant Christian leader who will remain anonymous told me, "A one-talent leader will always be a one-talent leader. All we as a seminary can do, is to make him or her a better one-talent leader."

I have been surprised, though, by how wrong my inner predictions have been, both of my own capabilities, and of how others will do as leaders. One of the college students I mentored was so socially awkward that he might have made most anyone's list of the least likely to be a leader of impact. Now, serving in a last frontier context, he is a very focused and effective leader. This understanding neglects the power of God to transform lives.

If indeed leadership capabilities can be shaped and developed, how does leadership capability emerge? Some fascinating intersections of thought from such divergent fields as Christian theology and discipleship, the business world, and human development fields are instructive at this point.

James Fowler studied the interplay between the fields of cognitive, moral, and psycho-social development as represented respectively by Piaget, Kohlberg, and Erickson. As applied to faith development, Fowler found one pre-stage and six stages of growth. The transitions between stages were sparked by newly emerging capabilities, coupled with a dissatisfaction with the limitations of the previous stage. In essence, the

person who had outgrown his former self, must choose to move on to the next level. Some, lacking the courage to make the perilous journey, remain stuck in a stage, and stilted in their faith development.[8]

J. Robert Clinton, in *The Making of a Leader*, posits his own stages, somewhat in parallel with Fowler's but blames God for them. God, according to Clinton, takes believers through specific developmental processes and phases to shape them into leaders. Leaders who respond positively to the various 'process items' are given enlarged responsibilities; those who shrink back remain stuck in the former stage in an endless reincarnation of the testing experiences.

Baptist saint Henry Blackaby, in his paradigm-shifting *Experiencing God* materials, also speaks of times of testing. His fifth reality of experiencing God is that God's invitation to join him in his work always leads you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.[9] This echoes the apocalyptic pronouncement that "he who overcomes will wear the crown of life"

Gary L. McIntosh and Samuel D. Rima in *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership*, propose that what actually propels a person toward leadership, is a missing block, an unmet need in his or her life. Like irritation to an oyster causing a pearl to be formed, the authors see dissatisfaction with one's present reality as the main ingredient in the stew of leadership formation. However, along with leadership capabilities, a shadow trails, dragging along the potential for devastating failure, unless it is recognized an addressed.[10]

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[8] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest For Meaning* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1981), 73-80, 100, 134, 150, 162, 173, 178, 181-84, 193, 276.

[9] Henry Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing His Will* Workbook (Nashville, Tennessee: Lifeway Press, 1990) 108.

[10] Gary L. McIntosh and Samuel D. Rima, *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership: The Paradox of Personal Dusfunction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998) 22-23.

Business guru Warren Bennis, in his fascinating book, *Geeks and Geezers*, declares that leadership capabilities are formed and refined through soul-jarring crucible experiences that test one's mettle. Into the crucible are poured one's era, individual factors, and experiences. Those who rise to the challenge develop new leadership capabilities including an enlarged adaptive capacity, an ability to inspire others, a distinctive voice, and an inner integrity.[11]

Reggie McNeal, sees not so much development stages as six contexts in which leaders are shaped. They are shaped, says McNeal, by one's own culture, call, community, and by communion, conflict, and the commonplace. Within these contexts, the complex divine-human drama of leader-shaping unfolds:

> Heart-shaping involves both divine and human activity. God does not unilaterally mold and sculpt passive human beings who exercise no role in scripting their life development. Humans can and do make choices as part of the expression of the image of God given to them. God will not override the power to choose, which he grants to humans. On the other hand, God is no passive observer. The Christian doctrine of providence maintains that God lovingly superintends every part of our lives. . . A marvelous and mysterious interface of divine and human choices conspires and contends in designing a life and in shaping the heart that lies at the center of it.[12]

What, then, can be learned from these sometimes parallel, and sometimes divergent visions? I conclude that leadership capabilities can develop, that they emerge from the interplay of genetics, life experiences, human choices, and the sovereign activity of God.[13] Further, I am convinced that relationships within the faith community play a

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[11] Warren G Bennis and Robert J. Thomas, *Geeks and Geezers: How Era, Values, and Defining Moments Shape Leaders* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002),

[12] Reggie McNeal, *A Work of Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000) xii.

[13] According to David Moshman, "Research in many domains of development has convinced most psychologists that complex psychological characteristics are virtually always the result of a complex interaction of (a) hereditary influences; (b)

central role in the development of leadership capabilities. The blessing of significant others is often the spark that enables a person to see him or herself as a called and gifted person capable of leading. As emerging leaders gaze into our eyes as faculty looking back at them, what do they see reflected?

While serving as a summer missionary in 1978, I came to understand God's call on my own life. That summer I also met a pastor whose whole ministry had been straightjacketed by a casual comment from a seminary professor while sharing a meal in the cafeteria. Sitting with the professor and a fellow student, he experienced the thrill of blessing, coupled with the agony of dismissal. The professor prophesied how far his friend---a rising ministerial star---would go in ministry, but how this student, being less gifted, would not fare so well in ministry. This limiting vision still haunted and handicapped the man years later. While despising the professor for his cutting comments, he had subconsciously adopted for himself this reduced vision of his own potential.

Identity theorist David Moshman defines one's identity as an explicit theory (or story) of the self in which one believes and to which one is committed. Identity is both discovered and constructed by the individual in a complex interplay with one's culture, one's community, and one's choices.[14] If that is the case, then we as faculty need to move from seeing ourselves as merely content-deliverers, or skill-developers. We need to take seriously our roles as seers, storytellers, and partners with God in shaping the

environmental (including cultural) influences; and (c) the individual's actions, interpretations, and constructions. Nativists stress the role of genes, empiricists stress the role of environment, and constructivists stress the role of the individual, but most developmentalists agree that all three considerations are important." David Moshman, "Identity as a Theory of Oneself", (*Genetic Epistomologist: The Journal of the Jean Piaget Society*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1998). Accessed online at http://www.piaget.org/GE/1998/GE-26-3.html on February 24, 2006. To Mossman's formulation, most Christians would recognize the primary role of divine initiative in the shaping of a person.

[14] David Moshman, "Identity as a Theory of Oneself" in *The Genetic Epistologogist: The Journal of the Jean Piaget Society*, vol.26, No. 3 (1998). Accessed online at http://www.piaget.org/GE-26-3.htm on February 27, 2006.

identities of those we lead. This generation of students has grown up in a world of information overload. They need handles with which to interpret, not only data, but also their own sense of self as well.

Here, though, is the catch: the primary language through which emerging leaders receive truth is *relationship*. Lacking the ability to absorb and make sense of the overwhelming and conflicting realities around them, they go to their 'tribe' to sort out the truth. How do the people they know, care about, and look up to, view this truth?

One might decry the loss of a theological 'textus receptus'—a unified understanding of revealed truth among this post-modern generation of believers. Noted, and agreed. But they are not therefore shallow heretics. Rather this emerging generation must reach and receive that systematic understanding initially through the tribal language of relationship. This requires of us three commitments. First we must establish a personal relationship with our students. Next, students need to see whether our own lives demonstrate an authentic relationship to the truths that we teach. Third, and only then can we establish a relationship between them and the content that we teach. The day of theological education as information dissemination is past.

4. How Can We Do A Better Job Of Shaping Leaders?

I have a few suggestions for ways that seminaries, and especially their faculty, can become better partners in leader-shaping. Faculty members might use McNeil's six contexts of leader-shaping as a guide for forging a relationship between ourselves and the students, between ourselves and the truth, and then between our students and the truths that we teach. In this way, we can partner with God in the leader-shaping process.

Culture, for example, as a context for shaping may lead us to ask a student questions such as "Tell me about your background, your family, and how you were

raised?" Such knowledge should effect how we teach. For example, if I comment on a well-made basketball goal, saying, "Boy, what a shot!" I may be using my cultural language to bring things down to earth and make a personal connection. But if that person happens to be an African American with a personal history of enduring racial prejudice and putdowns, he may hear "Boy!" in an entirely different way.

Likewise, I may be trying to help a student to suspend judgment and look at all options when considering how to interpret a passage of scripture. However, if that student's personal history includes impassioned coaching to watch out for heresy during seminary, my shock therapy method of teaching may lead her to question the very foundations of her faith, or cause her to recoil further into a more simplistic and inadequate faith.

Think also about McNeal's second shaping context of *Calling*. Taking time to learn about a student's sense of call will provide a personal context for teaching, and will keep us humbled about the divine stewardship that we have. I am proud to be a part of a seminary that takes seriously the role that this community plays in helping students clarify and build upon their call. My challenge is that the role of spiritual guide and calling coach should not be relegated only to the faculty who teach the *Foundations For Ministry* course. Rather, every faculty member has a role to play in understanding and shaping that call.

Michelangelo was reputedly asked, "How do you make such magnificent sculptures?" His response was that he simply carved away everything that was not the sculpture. In a sense, we serve as theological master sculptors, teaching students to carve away everything that does not look like divine calling in their lives. Sometimes calling is refined through teaching, often by asking questions, and occasionally by confronting ingrained and counterproductive behaviors.

The point is that we do not content ourselves with merely delivering unrooted facts. That is why dictionaries are published—as a storage place for disconnected factoids. Rather, we shape lives, and that can only be done life by life, one person at a time.

Community becomes a fourth context for leader-shaping. The multiple communities of family, friends, and faith communities serve to shape the leader's mental models. When conducting Doctor of Ministry admission interviews, I ask about an applicant's church experiences and his ministry heroes--those persons after whom he patterns his ministry. I learn more about the person from these two questions than from any others.

By *communion*, McNeal means the leader's conscious cultivation of a relationship with God. One of my favorite questions to ask students is simply, "Tell me your story". A second question is, "How are you and God getting along?" For most seminary students, their faith journey is the dominant aspect of their story. One part of that story includes the questions they bring to the classroom. Were I a theology professor, for example, I might want to ask what questions they would like to ask God.

Conflict too is a major shaper of persons. If I can enter into the stories of conflict and struggle a student has encountered, I will both understand her classroom responses better, and also be able to apply the salve of godly counsel as well.

A final context for leader-shaping is that of the *Commonplace*—How a leader responds to everyday challenges and opportunities. I remember learning during my own seminary days of the loving way a former theology professor daily washed and clothed his invalid wife. He showed Christ's love in ways more real than any theological truth he may have tried to teach. What theology was going on in those daily acts of love?

We as faculty don't just teach facts: we model life as well. One of my greatest personal agonies has been the disconnect between the beauty of the faith I believe, and the tattered edges of the life that I sometimes live before my students. I cannot, though, take the easy and false way out to imagine that I can separate the two. In the everyday way that I relate to students, administration, fellow faculty members and even those spouses of my students who happen to occupy a job on campus—all these are my theology.

I believe that ideas can shape people powerfully. But ideas are best administered within the context of redemptive human relationships. It is through relationship that hope is sustained as we provide our students with new insights and offer enlarged mental and theological perspectives. We serve as theological sherpas[15], guiding the way up to the next level of a students' journey, like wise trail guides walking before—and with—them.

One thing must be made clear. I am not advocating the abandonment of teaching theological content to be replaced with a kind of touchy-feely experiential approach to seminary education. One of the great gifts that seminaries offer those preparing for ministry is a groundedness and depth that is sorely lacking in the church today. My year serving as a collegiate minister in Utah prior to seminary raised significant theological questions that could only be answered by a thoroughgoing understanding of the Bible, Church history, and theology.

If we do not graduate persons who can rightly divide the Word and apply it contextually where they serve, we have failed them and failed our God-given mandate. Ours is a holy task of helping budding ministers become the best theologically-grounded, most highly-skilled ministers of Christ they can be. Ignorance is indeed

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[15] Sherpa, n. "A Tibetan people living on the high southern slopes of the Himalayas and skilled in mountain climbing" *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged*: G & C Merriam Co.: Springfield, MA, 1976.

expensive. But our mandate extends beyond text, system, and technique. We must, with the Apostle Paul, embrace our full calling, not just as educators, but as those entrusted with a higher calling that includes life modeling. Can we not so strive to live that, with the Apostle Paul, we might say, "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well." (1 Thes. 2:8). Paul knew that passion emerges from content (the gospel) infused with passion, and transmitted through relationship.

Eugene Peterson, insightful as always, brings into clear focus the challenge that is before us as faculty:

> The only way that God reveals himself is personally. . . never impersonally as a force or an influence, never abstractly as an idea or truth or principle. And so, of course he can't be known impersonally or abstractly.
> We are not used to this. We are schooled in institutions that train us in the acquisition of facts and data, of definitions and diagrams, of explanations and analysis. Our schools are very good at doing this. When we study persons, either God or humans, we bring the same methods to the work: analyzing, defining, typing, charting, profiling. The uniquely personal and particular is expunged from the curriculum; and that means the removal of the most important things about us—love and hope and faith, sin and forgiveness and grace, obedience and loyalty and prayer—as significant for understanding and developing as persons. The fact is that when we are studied like specimens in a laboratory, what is learned is on the level of what is learned from an autopsy. The only way to know another is in a personal relationship, and that involves at least minimal levels of trust and risk.[16]

It is far easier to deal in impersonal facts and quizzes than to expose ourselves personally as faculty to the dangers of personal relationship with our students. The fear is that they will find a disconnect between our facts and our lives. Yet this is a generation of students who demand authenticity; not perfection but honesty about one's journey.

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[16] Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 304.

Frankly, what I am advocating is a hard task. It is much safer, much easier to retreat into the safety of our subject area. If so, we become complicit in the compartmentalization of life that results in ministers who are themselves segmented—excellent preachers, but lousy parents, superb in the skills of pastoral care, but unable to address the demons of the flesh. They may be able to state categorically their view of eschatology, but are unable to relate to the struggles of the person in the pew—because we ourselves have not led the way.

I make this case as one who sees a mountain in the distance, and toward which I am walking. I am not there yet. But I believe this to be the correct destination. And I invite my colleagues from various seminaries and divinity schools to join me in this journey, a journey that integrates content, relationship, and personhood-shaping. This is the holy task with which we have been entrusted.

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