The Seminaries and the Churches: Looking for New Relationships

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This article, by American church historian Timothy Weber, traces historical developments in the relationship between theological schools and the church within the United States. Many theological schools were founded by denominations, reflecting the particular character and emphases of those bodies. Some schools left their denominational roots, while additional schools were founded as independent institutions. Weber traces the variety of authority structures found in theological schools in the United States that reflect both the character of the ecclesial bodies with which they are associated and the nature of the relationship. He then outlines the dramatic changes that have taken place in theological education since the 1960s, as well as changes within the church in the United States, and analyzes theories that seek to explain these changes. The article concludes with reflections on the future challenges and opportunities for theological schools in the United States and the churches they serve.

Introduction

Seminaries and the churches are connected in important and even essential ways. In his address to the 2004 ATS Biennial Meeting, Daniel Aleshire summarized well this special relationship:

> Most seminaries were founded by church bodies, or struggles within ecclesial communities, or religious movements that, typically, mature into church bodies. Most theological schools continue in some pattern of relationship. There is no parallel in other forms of graduate professional education. Law schools were not founded by courts or legislatures or law firms. Medical schools were seldom founded by hospitals. Few graduate schools of business have been founded by corporations. Theological schools have a one-of-a-kind relationship with the communities that established them.[1]

While this relationship is undeniable, it is not uniform. Even a casual examination of ATS-affiliated institutions shows that they relate to churches in a variety of ways and that those relationships are changing. The purpose of this study is to delineate the different ways that churches and schools relate to each other, define how these historic relationships are being altered by the current context, and explore some of the most pressing challenges and opportunities that are pushing schools and churches to find new ways of relating to each other.

Theological schools and the churches: Defining traditional relationships

For two centuries most organized religious life in North America has been expressed in denominational terms. North Americans did not originate the concept of denominationalism, but they did develop and apply it in unprecedented ways. After losing direct state support, the churches had to fend for themselves within a new pay-as-you-go religious economy. They soon developed new strategies, ranging from competitive to cooperative, that enabled them to endure and prosper. Whatever their ecclesiology, all denominations functioned as voluntary societies that offered cover and support in the new context. They preserved and transmitted their traditions, blended beliefs and behaviors into robust religious ecologies, pooled resources for mission and expansion, and eventually provided a full range of goods and services to enrich and deepen their distinctive religious identities. Over time many denominations added specialized ministries like publishing houses, missionary agencies, and humanitarian programs to enhance their effectiveness and extend their reach.

The building of theological schools

They also founded schools. From the seventeenth century well into the nineteenth, Protestant denominations founded most of the colleges in North America; and in the early nineteenth century, these denominations—or smaller entities within them—began to establish separate theological schools for the training of ministers, starting with Andover in 1808.[2] The reasons for doing so were many. In the competitive world of free-market religion, Protestants needed a steady supply of qualified and faithful ministers who could preserve and promote their traditions in local congregations. As their denominations grew numerically, spread geographically, and became more diverse theologically, some people desired schools closer to home to meet local needs or institutions that reflected more closely their own theological convictions. New denominations did not want to rely on others for their theological education, so they founded schools of their own. In response to the surge of new immigrants in the mid- and late-nineteenth century, a number of seminaries added foreign language departments, some of which grew into separate schools to serve ethnic congregations and denominations. Not all schools were created *de novo* by ecclesiastical bodies. Some began as Bible institutes or departments of Bible or religion in existing colleges;[3] in a few cases, independent religious movements or even entrepreneurial pastors and their congregations established new institutions.[4]

Roman Catholic theological education in America started in 1791, with the founding of Saint Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, and quickly developed a variety of models: Diocesan seminaries that served the needs of one or more diocese; religious order and provincial schools; "national seminaries" that trained priests from a particular national or ethnic group; and "domestic" seminaries in which local bishops gathered and supervised priests-in-training. The Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1883 sought to standardize the educational

requirements in major seminaries and raise the scholarly quality of their faculties. The founding of the Catholic University of America in 1889 supported the academic training of seminary instructors.[5]

By 1875 virtually all of the major Protestant denominations had their own theological schools. While many were still academically marginal, a growing number, especially those with ties to the newer universities, embraced the new critical scholarship. Such rising academic aspirations often produced new and controversial theological identities that provoked the starting of more schools, either in protest or in emulation.[6]

A turning point for theological education occurred in the late-1930s, when thirty-seven graduate-level theological schools in the United States and Canada formed the American Association of Theological Schools. All of these schools, with one exception, were what became known as mainline Protestant;[7] and many of them had connections to universities. In the ensuing decades, the association sharpened its academic and institutional standards, steadily moved toward a professional model of ministerial training, and became more denominationally and theologically diverse. Starting in the 1960s, evangelical and Roman Catholic schools began joining ATS in large numbers, which dramatically changed the demographics and ethos of accredited theological education in the United States and Canada.[8]

ATS has more than 250 member schools: nearly two-thirds of these are free-standing institutions, and about one-third is either college- or university-based. In addition, four out of five ATS members identify themselves as denominational (70% Protestant, 28% Roman Catholic, and 2% Orthodox), which leaves only one in five calling itself inter- or nondenominational. As a result of such diversity, ATS schools relate to churches in a variety of ways. ATS standards recognize that many schools have multiple relationships and mandate that they carefully spell out in official documents how lines of authority and governance function in actual practice (General Institutional Standard 8). Certainly each school has its own story and its own unique way of relating to other institutions and ecclesial bodies. Thus when studying the multiform relationships between schools and churches, it is important to understand that each institution will share some things in common with other schools but retain distinctives of its own. It is beyond the scope of this study to analyze in detail all the ways that ATS schools and their supporting churches relate to each other. But it is important to recognize that significant differences do exist within the Association.

Placing schools on the governance/authority spectrum

In practice, schools are spread out along an organizational spectrum according to their governance and authority structures. At one end are schools "owned and operated" by a denominational sponsor. At the other end are schools with no official or legal ties to any religious body. Most schools exist somewhere between these extremes and function under diverse ecclesiastical relationships. Accordingly, generalizations are hard to come by; and merely labeling a school as denominational or inter/nondenominational does not explain very much about that institution's actual relationship to churches. Com-

plicating the analysis even more is the realization that denominations are not what they used to be and that new kinds of relationships between theological schools and church bodies are already being formed.

Trustee boards. Where a school is located along the spectrum is determined by a number of factors. The most important is the fundamental issue of authority and governance, those formal relationships, legal and otherwise, that define how a school functions. For example, how are trustees selected? For some schools, all trustee appointments come through ecclesiastical channels. In some institutions, the sponsoring denominations retain the authority both to nominate and to elect trustees, while in others, the presiding bishop makes such appointments. Sometimes the makeup of the seminary board is prescribed. In the ELCA, for example, 20 percent of seminary board members are elected by the national church body, two bishops are elected from the school's supporting synods, and the remainder are elected by the synods themselves. In some denominational schools all trustees must come from the sponsoring church, while in others, a quota system ensures the sponsoring church's majority on the board, while allowing the inclusion of others.

In some cases, the trustee board must submit its nominations for new members to the church for approval. This denominational vote is often pro-forma, but some churches regularly exercise their right to turn down board nominations and substitute their own. In still other arrangements, trustee boards have the authority to elect their own members with the understanding that the sponsoring denomination will always be adequately represented, though what "adequately represented" means is left up to the individual school's board (e.g., the American Baptist Churches USA [ABCUSA]). These variations demonstrate that even in schools with the strongest denominational ties, governance and authority structures may differ significantly.

Senior administrators and faculty. Denominations can also play a major role in the selection of senior administrators and even faculty members. In some schools, ecclesiastical authorities appoint senior administrators, but in others, denominational interests are served by placing their representatives on presidential and faculty search committees. Some denominations reserve the right to vote on both senior administrators and faculty: after making it through the standard institutional search process, final nominees must also be interviewed by a separate church entity and affirmed by an official vote of the church.[9] In most denominational schools, however, the authority for selecting both senior administrators and faculty resides in the board of trustees, which often includes denominational representatives in the search and approval process. Whatever the formal involvement of the church, most institutions establish their own criteria for the selection of administrators and faculty, which invariably includes considerations of denominational affiliation or compatibility with the sponsoring church.

Denominational support. Historically, schools connected to the denominational system experienced certain obvious benefits. Until recently, most denominations had well-established religious ecologies that functioned as a virtual feeder-system for theological education. Young people attended Sunday school and youth programs, went to summer camps and weekend

retreats, and may have gone to parochial schools or church-related colleges, all of which encouraged them to consider the ministry as vocation. Those responding to such a call were carefully guided through the church's educational and credentialing system that led to ordination. The same churches that nurtured their young people into theological schools also provided a place for them to serve after they graduated.

In addition, denominationally connected seminaries could expect a steady flow of financial support. Of course, denominations differed considerably in how much support they gave and how they provided it. Some denominations gave undesignated, direct grants to their schools, while others specified how their donations could be used. Furthermore, such money might flow from multiple sources within the denominational system: the national body, regional entities, local congregations, and individual church members. Denominations and individual congregations often supported theological schools by providing scholarships or internships. As a result, many denominational schools were essentially "kept institutions" and relied heavily on the denominational pipeline for ongoing support. As we shall see, for many schools the flow through the denominational pipeline has slowed considerably, leaving them short of students, placements, and funding.

Multiple church connections. In contrast to those institutions accountable to just one religious body, a number of ATS schools have multiple denominational connections. In her recent "Study of ATS Schools Related to Multiple Denominations," Phyllis Anderson identified four kinds of interdenominational schools: those founded to be ecumenical, those that became multidenominational through merger, those that became multidenominational in response to needs and opportunities, and those that became multidenominational (or nondenominational) after severing earlier denominational ties.[10] She showed that such institutions nurture a number of complicated church relationships, both formal and informal. Sometimes these schools set aside certain trustee "seats" for particular denominations or use formal "letters of agreement" to establish working relationships with multiple denominations. Some schools support their multiple commitments by recruiting a denominationally diverse faculty or by establishing within their curriculum distinct denominational "tracks" to meet the ordination or credentialing requirements of their students. Such practices have become commonplace in many denominational schools as well, where students from other traditions sometimes outnumber those from the sponsoring church. Even nondenominational schools must develop various kinds of church relationships; and it is a rare Protestant denominational school that can operate with only one "parent." Like it or not, most denominational schools must function like interdenominational institutions, with many parents, not just one.

Accountability structures. Another factor that has shaped the traditional relationships between school and church is the existence of established accountability structures that keep schools firmly connected to their supporters. The variations here are also numerous, depending on church polity. Four examples will suffice.

The eight ELCA seminaries are overseen by the Unit on Vocation and Education, which regularly brings together seminary administrators for reflection and planning and facilitates substantive conversations with seminary faculty and administrators to ensure the effective training of ministers of Word and Sacrament. One important example of the latter was the production in 1993 of "Eleven Imperatives for Theological Education," which became "the planning and guiding focus for the preparation of leaders for this church into the 21st century."[11]

The Presbyterian Church (USA) relates to its ten seminaries through the General Assembly's Committee on Theological Education (COTE). Meeting twice a year, senior seminary administrators come together under the committee's auspices to work on a list of issues assigned by the General Assembly or some other denominational entity. Given Presbyterian polity, COTE is where the fundamental relationship between church and school is defined and lived out. Even so, PC(USA) seminaries have independent trustee boards that stay connected to the church primarily through historic and personal ties.

In stark contrast to these systems of accountability is the "covenant relationship" that connects ten seminaries and the American Baptist Churches (ABC). In typical northern Baptist fashion, the ties that bind are not well defined and depend more on goodwill, historical memory, and personal relationships than on clearly articulated institutional structures or obligations. In fact, the only official institutional connection between the schools and the denomination is the American Baptist Association of Seminary Administrators that is called together annually by the Board of National Ministries. Such gatherings are heavy on fellowship but light on official business. In practical terms, then, ABC seminaries are led by self-perpetuating boards that are free to make covenant agreements with other denominations as well, which eight of the ten schools have done. As a result, ABC schools tend to have stronger ties with one or more of the thirty-five ABC regions, which provide more direct help in recruitment, placement, and financial support.

The Roman Catholic Church owns and operates the largest system of theological schools in North America. Katarina Schuth has identified five kinds of Catholic theological schools: those owned by one or more (arch)diocese(s), those owned and conducted by corporations, those owned by (arch)diocese(s) or religious orders and conducted by religious orders for the training of diocesan priests, those owned and conducted by religious orders for religious order students, and university-based ministry programs for lay students.[12] These schools experience high levels of accountability and institutional oversight. For example, following the 1918 *Code of Canon Law*, Catholic seminaries conformed to a traditional model of theological education: they became quasi-monastic, followed a seventeenth century view of the priesthood, and were closely tied to Rome. In the 1960s, Vatican II directed seminaries to train priests more in relation to the people they will serve. In 1971 the U.S. Bishops' Conference developed and the Holy See approved new guidelines in the *Program of Priestly Formation* (PPF); and in 1981 Pope John Paul II mandated an apostolic visitation of all seminaries in the United States to identify strengths and weaknesses. After years of consultation, in 1993 the bishops issued the

fourth edition of the PPF, which has become the normative guide for the formation of Catholic clergy in the seminaries.[13]

Most theological schools do not relate to their sponsoring churches in such formal ways; but all schools are accountable to their supporters and must connect with churches at some level—national, regional, or local. In some cases, smaller denominations without seminaries of their own have "adopted" nondenominational schools with compatible theological and "churchly" identities; and the adopted schools have reciprocated by providing regular opportunities for communication and advice.[14] A number of denominational schools have also received such unofficial recognition and have learned to make the most of it. In some ways, then, the lines that separate denominational and inter/nondenominational schools have become quite blurry. In part this is because the old denominational system has itself undergone significant transformation, and the schools find themselves facing more or less the same pressures.

The new context for theological education

In the last forty years, significant changes have occurred in both schools and churches. These changes have been well documented, and many seminary faculty and administrators now approaching retirement can recall when and how they took place. Thus the following commentary will appear to many as simply "what is," the world in which we have been living for some time. Nevertheless, it is instructive to be reminded of how things have changed.

Charting the changes in theological schools

In the 1960s, with few exceptions, theological students were single white males, right out of college. Most studied full time, graduated on time, and intended to become ordained ministers serving local congregations. Organized religion experienced significant growth during the 1950s, and most theological educators expected the good times to continue. Their goal was to produce spiritually mature religious professionals to lead strong and growing churches.[15]

Student demographics. In the early twenty-first century, theological schools look very different than they did in the 1960s, especially in terms of student demographics. Women, who in the '60s were almost too few to count, currently make up 36 percent of all students in ATS schools; and in some institutions they comprise 50 percent of the total. Also scarce in the 1960s were racial/ethnic students, who now make up 38 percent of all theological students, which is comparable to the percentages found in other professional schools. (The breakdown for ATS faculty is less dramatic: 23 percent women and 17 percent racial/ethnic.) Today's theological students also tend to make up their minds about ministry and theological study much later than students in the past, *after* college graduation. As a result, two-thirds of all theological students are over the age of 30, with the largest cohort in the 40–49 age range.[16] For personal and economic reasons, many of these students are part-time students, and many of them are already involved in full-time ministry. As a result, they come to seminary as experienced ministers who want to sharpen their pastoral skills and deepen their knowledge, not as novices who hope to learn the basics and enter the ministry after graduation.

In a nutshell, today's students are more diverse than they used to be, decide only after college to come to seminary, are older when they arrive, acquire more educational debt along the way,[17] take longer to finish, and thus have fewer years to serve in their chosen ministries.

Expanding programs. As historical funding sources declined, many schools sought to increase revenues by developing new degree programs, including master's programs in specialized ministries, general theological studies, and the nearly ubiquitous Doctor of Ministry, which significantly helped the bottom line in many schools during the 1980s and '90s. To attract additional students, schools also employed new delivery systems: block scheduling; evening, weekend, and intensive courses; extension sites; online classes; continuing education for clergy; and nondegree certificate programs for clergy and lay people. Roman Catholic institutions saw declining numbers of seminarians somewhat offset by the arrival of lay students, many of whom were women, who wanted training in parish pastoral work to alleviate the shortage of available priests. As a result, many schools devised new mission statements to reflect these new programs and identities and had to reallocate their resources to accommodate the changes.

Today's theological schools are thus more complex than they used to be, offer more degrees than ever, often feel stretched to the limit by their expanding programs, wonder where their future students and funding will come from, and are searching for ways to cope with the changes that are occurring in their supporting churches and in the broader culture.

Growing invisibility. Despite these significant changes in programs and mission, most theological schools have become essentially unknown in their own communities. According to an Auburn Center study, "Seminaries are virtually invisible to leaders of secular organizations and institutions, even those in the seminary's own city and region." Most civic leaders do not understand what seminaries do and thus do not view them as either civic or educational assets in the community. "They are not part of the civic mix. When important decisions about social policies or community projects are at stake, seminaries and those who work in them are rarely asked to participate . . ." While there are some exceptions (mainly African American seminary presidents), most seminary personnel do not see such involvement as part of their job description and prefer to devote their energies to seminary or church-related concerns.

Evidently that strategy has not created greater visibility in church circles either. The Auburn Center study concluded that seminaries are largely invisible in their supporting churches as well: "Most of the seminaries we studied are known to only a fairly small circle of insiders of their own religious tradition—denominational executives, clergy, and the members of some congregations that are either large or located close to the seminary's campus."[18] If seminaries are invisible to most churchgoers, then what does that say about the future viability of what has been the crucial relationship between theological schools and their supporting churches? Certainly, there are two sides to every relationship. If the seminaries have changed over the last forty years, the churches have changed even more.

The reshuffling of North American religion

Sometimes it is hard to believe how much organized religion in North America has changed in the last generation. In 1960 mainline Protestants believed they were true because they were big; evangelicals believed they were true because they were small; and Roman Catholics believed they had finally made it into the American mainstream with the election of JFK.

Alterations in the religious landscape. Things are different now. Mainline Protestants have been losing members and social influence since the mid-1960s, a decline that continues to the present day. Evangelicals have seen steady growth, the maturing of their institutions, and new-found political power. Roman Catholics have significantly increased their numbers but simultaneously witnessed a huge drop in mass attendance and a severe decline in the number of priests, seminarians, and religious. Recently the Church's hierarchy has lost much moral authority and credibility due to its handling of the sex scandal involving priests.[19]

For these and other reasons, some dramatic shifts have occurred in North American religious life. An examination of the American Religion Data Archives shows that, while there may be regional or local variations, at the national level there are now more evangelicals than mainline Protestants, more Catholics than evangelicals, and more "unclaimed" than Catholics. After nearly two hundred years of increases, in the last two decades, percentages of "religious adherence" have declined, with the greatest percentage losses occurring in the Bible Belt.[20] Here is the real story of the last forty years: organized religion has steadily lost ground to the "nones," those who tell pollsters that they have no religious affiliation whatsoever.[21]

New roles for organized religion. In addition to shifting patterns of religious allegiance, the role of religion in North American culture has changed considerably. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow calls this trend the "restructuring of American religion." He argues that since World War II, organized religion has been increasingly marginalized by an aggressive secular mindset, pushed out of the public square by those who think that religious convictions should be relegated to the areas of private opinion or personal preference.[22] Philip Hammond and others call these changes the "third religious disestablishment." The first brought about the constitutional separation of church and state but left in place a de-facto, unofficial Protestant establishment. In the second disestablishment, which occurred in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, this Protestant hegemony gave way to the widespread conviction that Roman Catholicism and Judaism were also bona fide ways of being American. In the third disestablishment, which began in the 1960s, these dominant Judeo-Christian values were successfully challenged by aggressive notions of individualism, personal autonomy, and religious pluralism.[23] Growing numbers of people turned from traditional organized religion to embrace an amorphous and usually noninstitutional spirituality or no religion at all.[24] Many of those who opted out of organized religion are not necessarily opposed to traditional religious beliefs. They simply reject the notion that one must belong to a church to believe them or be a good person. Reginald Bibby found similar trends in Canada, where they appeared to be more prominent and widespread than in the States.[25] This

reversal of fortunes has produced a spirited counterattack by those who feel excluded. The resulting conflict between traditionalists and secularists or progressives has been called a "culture war."[26]

Theories to explain the changes. There are many theories to explain these changes, especially the losses in mainline Protestantism. Among the most verifiable are theories about demographics and birth rates: during the 1960s many children of mainline Protestant parents left the church, and most of them never came back. Furthermore, families in the Protestant mainline tend to have fewer children, due to their higher educational and economic levels. Both observations tend to support each other: once a generation leaves the church, it is very difficult to make up the losses.

There have been other theories: some observers have blamed the decline on widespread dissatisfaction with denominational leaders who take unpopular political stands or push the church to accept controversial ideas or practices. Though popular and somewhat intuitive, that theory has not survived the scrutiny of careful research. Nevertheless, it is in the process of being tested again in light of the deep divisions within the churches over issues of theology and lifestyle, especially homosexuality. Theories with more staying power have pointed to the impact of changing social values within the culture. During the 1960s and '70s new ideas about marriage, sex, family, personal freedom, and tolerance of untraditional lifestyles gained wide acceptance among educated young people who preferred them to traditional church teachings and dropped out of church. While it is indisputable that there was a dramatic shift in social values beginning in the 1960s, the theory does not explain why those who left the church did not return when many mainline Protestants themselves adopted similar views later on.[27]

More recent studies have focused attention back on the declining churches themselves. In a widely discussed article, "Mainline Churches: The Real Reason for Decline," the authors noted that "the single best predictor of church participation turned out to be *belief*—orthodox Christian belief, and especially the teaching that a person can be saved only through Jesus Christ. . . . Ninety-five percent of the drop-outs who describe themselves as religious do not believe it." These researchers argue that the real cause of mainline decline is the pervasiveness of "lay liberalism," which the authors describe as "largely a homemade product, a kind of modern-age folk religion" that does not posses "a highly elaborated or richly developed system of thought." Lay liberals prefer Christianity to other religions but do not base their personal preference on exclusive truth claims. They affirm the basic morality taught in all religions and believe that God speaks through the Bible, the Koran, and Buddhist sutras. In short, lay liberalism "supports honesty and other moral virtues, and it encourages tolerance and civility in a pluralistic society, but it does not inspire the kind of conviction that creates strong religious communities."[28] Without strong, defining beliefs, once-strong religious ecologies begin to fall apart. Other studies have come to the same conclusions.[29]

Similar debates have raged within Roman Catholicism. Traditionalists and progressives have squared off over the nature of church authority, clerical celibacy, the ordination of women, contraception and abortion, and the ten-

dency of North American Catholics to pick and choose, cafeteria style, among the Church's doctrines and moral teachings. Traditionalists are convinced that losses in the priesthood, religious orders, and mass attendance are the result of a lack of church discipline and the rejection of church teachings. Progressives argue the opposite: such losses stem from an overbearing hierarchy, public scandals within the church, and the unwillingness of the church's leadership to adjust to contemporary moral, intellectual, and practical realities. Such divisions are evident within Catholic theological education: seminaries support the traditional side and university-based schools of theology the progressive side.[30]

Even evangelicals, who occasionally can be seen gloating over their current privileged place in American religion, are not beyond self-criticism and internal strife. Beneath the appearance of strength and relative invulnerability are deep fissures that divide evangelicalism's amazingly diverse constituency. Any movement that includes Southern Baptists, Pentecostals, die-hard fundamentalists, the "truly Reformed," holiness churches, racial/ethnic minorities, independents, and many members of mainline Protestantism (and Roman Catholics and Orthodox?) is bound to have some internal disagreements from time to time. Some evangelicals fret over whether their well-publicized participation in the culture war and party politics will undercut their spiritual power and the ability to reform the churches and reach the unchurched. Others resent their movement being commandeered by the political right. Some evangelical leaders chafe when they are identified as fundamentalists, while others are worried that their movement is getting soft on creeping liberalism.[31] Increasing numbers of evangelicals are realizing that most of their present growth comes from the ranks of new immigrants and racial minorities, which is the same pattern among mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics.[32]

Questions about the viability of denominations. Given the continuing difficulties in organized American religion, many have questioned the viability of the denominational system itself. Fewer members mean fewer dollars to finance denominational programs. As a result, many denominations are a shadow of their former selves. A strong trend in the broader culture—which some identify as postmodern—is the shift to decentralized power and the preference for local networks where accountability is high and involvement is more hands-on. Denominational loyalty is clearly waning in some circles, as can be seen in the prevalence of "switching" and the tendency among some to drop the denominational identifier from their church's (or theological school's) name.

One thing is certain: denominations are not the only way to organize religious life. Among the most significant developments in recent North American religion is the emergence of new church and parachurch networks. Since denominations cannot provide all the goods and services they used to, congregations are partnering with parachurch or social service ministries and each other to create their own networks for outreach and fellowship. Many churches and their leaders prefer these networks to traditional denominations because they are ad hoc and based more on fellowship and shared values than binding mutual obligations. The Willow Creek Association, for example, now numbers 10,500 congregations from ninety denominations and thirty-five countries. Its members look to Willow Creek for new directions in worship

and church life, conferences for inspiration and training, and the like. Other informal networks organize around successful pastors whose books have offered new and helpful ministry models. For instance, thousands of pastors from a variety of denominations now connect with Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in Southern California as a result of reading and implementing his best-selling *The Purpose Driven Life* and *The Purpose Driven Church*. On a smaller scale, the evangelical Leadership Network facilitates "learning communities," "teaching churches," and the like in order to promote creative thinking, new patterns of church life, and strategies for change. In a nutshell, the Leadership Network "commends the work of practitioners teaching other practitioners." In many ways, such new networks perform many, but not all, of the functions of the older denominations; and growing numbers of pastors and congregations find them more helpful.

Some networks appear to be morphing into new denomination-like structures. The Calvary Chapel and Vineyard networks immediately come to mind, as does the mostly-under-the-radar New Apostolic Reformation (NAR) that includes a loose federation of modern day apostles and prophets who lead fast-growing churches that engage in spiritual warfare around the world. The NAR does not seem remotely interested in traditional theological education, but it has created its own association of unaccredited schools and training opportunities that directly support its ministry style and goals.

It may be too early to sign the death certificate for denominations. A number of recent studies have shown that instead of passing away, denominations are changing into new, more streamlined forms. As Martin Marty has observed, a look at the Yellow Pages between "chiropractors" and "cigars" demonstrates that most congregations still want to be known by their denominational connections, and many churches have decided to re-emphasize their denominational distinctives, even while they seek new ways of living out their faith commitments in what many experts call a postdenominational age.[33] The fact remains that many denominations are growing, partly because they emphasize their identities and the benefits of working together to accomplish God's will in the world.

Signs of strength and hope. It is obvious that something significant has happened to North American religion since the middle of the twentieth century. Now evangelicals believe they are true because they are big; mainline Protestants believe they are true because they are small; and Roman Catholics are still struggling with the legacy of Vatican II and the existence of rival ecclesiologies and theologies within the Church.

Despite the continuing losses in "oldline" Protestantism, there is good news as well as bad. David Roozen has studied the trends and concluded that there are "pockets of vitality within a continuing stream of decline." He is encouraged by the fact that the current rate of decline is about half of what it was in the 1970s and that there are a number of "adaptive practices" that have produced growth in the mainline congregations that use them. These include high intentionality (a clear purpose with an outward orientation), the use of contemporary worship, an emphasis on personal and familial spiritual practices, and multiple church-based programs to attract and hold people with a

variety of interests. Diana Butler Bass's study has identified numerous growing mainline congregations and the practices that have brought new enthusiasm, involvement, and service.[34]

While the growing edge of organized religion currently belongs to evangelical, Pentecostal, ethnic, and independent churches, many mainline Protestant and Catholic churches are booming as well. New and often controversial models of church life are already evident. The so-called emergent church adopts a postmodern approach to church life by combining various strains of traditional and contemporary Christianity. It is often identified by its commitment to "ancient-future faith," which builds highly intensive religious communities by reclaiming ancient church identities and practices.[35] Another pattern can be seen in the "new paradigm" churches that combine a charismatic style with apostolic patterns of church life to do battle with hostile cosmic forces as history moves toward the Second Coming of Christ.[36] The megachurches continue to acquire higher percentages of North America's church-going public, and fast-growing independent churches provide even more alternatives for the "formerly denominational."[37]

Challenges and opportunities

All of these strengths and weaknesses in contemporary religion have a direct bearing on theological education as it faces its own future. Because seminaries exist in and are dependent on this changing religious ecology, they now face a number of challenges and opportunities.

Adjusting to institutional challenges for the schools

Since the formation of separate theological schools about two hundred years ago, three questions have loomed large: where will our students come from, where will we send them once they graduate, and who is going to foot the bill for the work we do? Changes in the school/church relationship bring a new urgency to finding answers to those questions.

Student recruitment. In light of the demise of the old denominational college feeder system,[38] we should not be surprised by Barbara Wheeler's recent finding that "most of today's students come to theological school from a congregation rather than a campus."[39] Students consider the possibility of vocational ministry through the influence of pastors, family, and friends within their own religious communities, which is as it should be, many will argue. But what happens to the call to ministry when so many congregations are troubled and in decline? It is difficult to hear God's call when the congregation is conflicted, the leaders are miserable, the membership is shrinking, and the congregation's survival is in doubt. Without restored, healthy congregations, student recruitment is made more difficult. The Theological Programs for High School Youth and Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation sponsored by Lilly Endowment are helping schools and churches identify and nurture early recruits. But such efforts will not amount to much in the long run without the existence of robust religious communities to support the process. Complicating such recruiting efforts is the fact that, in general, semi-

naries have a difficult time competing with other professional schools—such as those for law and medicine—for the best and brightest students.

Placement issues. In the past, many new seminary graduates found their first appointment in a "starter congregation," usually a small congregation with limited resources. These churches are relatively easy to find because about 70 percent of all Protestant congregations in America have fewer than a hundred in Sunday attendance. Historically, such congregations were able to pay a starting wage and expected to see young pastors come and go. But many of these smaller congregations are no longer able to afford a full-time ordained pastor, since at present most seminary graduates are second career people with a family, a mortgage, and a large student loan to repay. As a result, many denominations report large numbers of empty pulpits and no easy way to fill them.[40] Experts argue over whether there is a real shortage of pastors or just a distribution problem.[41] According to the ELCA bishop of the Indiana-Kentucky synod, "if we could distribute our clergy, we'd have enough. But distribution is a problem because of where folks need to locate." A United Methodist official observed that "We don't have a shortage of pastors; we have a shortage of seminary graduates who are going into pastoral ministry."[42]

A recent study supports such an observation, concluding that fewer theological students than before enter seminary intending to pursue the ordained ministry: "Though 80 percent say that their goal is a 'religious' profession or occupation, fewer (60%) plan to be ordained, and ministry in a congregation or parish is the primary goal of less than one-third of students."[43] Today's students have many other nonpastoral ministry options: counseling, chaplaincy, youth and family ministry, teaching, social service, administration, and the like.

Of course, not all congregations or denominations report pastor shortages. There is no apparent placement problem for suburban or urban congregations, only in the smaller and rural churches. In the last analysis, the most serious shortage is in the area of church membership. Shrinking congregations have a hard time finding or affording pastoral leadership; growing ones do not.[44] As we shall see, because of these placement (or shortage?) problems, many denominations have developed alternatives that have far-reaching consequences for theological schools.

Funding problems. Because of their own difficulties, many denominational bodies have had to reduce their funding for theological education; and nobody should expect them to restore the lost funding any time soon. Even when denominations have been able to maintain old giving levels, their funding covers a smaller percentage of expanding seminary budgets. As a result, many denominational schools no longer qualify as "kept institutions" and wonder why their sponsoring denominations should retain the same level of control when they provide reduced levels of financial support. In his study on the financing of theological schools, Tony Ruger stated the obvious conclusion: "leaders of denominational seminaries must engage their sponsoring church bodies in serious conversations about the shape of a mission partnership in which financial support will play a smaller role."[45]

The attrition of denominational funding has left many schools in an extremely difficult financial situation. Most theological schools do not have siz-

able endowments; many are burdened by older campus facilities with crushing deferred maintenance costs; probably most are becoming increasingly invisible to potential donors; and few can realistically expect new income from increasing the size of their student body or adding new degree programs, even if they could afford to establish them. Many senior administrators and trustees have crunched the numbers and have serious doubts about the long-term financial viability of their institutions. It is now common in ATS circles to hear leaders openly speculate that in the next decade or two a significant number of member schools will close their doors for financial reasons. Without new funding sources or the drastic cutting of operational expenses, many schools will not survive.

Changing views of the ministry and alternate paths to ordination. Equally serious for theological schools are changing concepts of the ministry. For decades many denominations worked hard to develop and improve their ordination standards. This was true especially in the so-called connectional churches that required seminary degrees for ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Segments of the "free-church tradition" also sought to raise standards, even when they stopped short of mandating educational requirements for ordination. The desire for an educated (or professional) ministry was one of the great goals and achievements of the denominational system and the driving force behind the creation of The Association of Theological Schools.

For a number of reasons, many of the same churches that insisted on an educated and ordered ministry have recently developed alternate paths to ordination that do not require a seminary degree. The reasons are practical and telling: as stated above, many small and struggling congregations are unable to acquire a seminary-trained and ordained pastor, so alternatives are necessary. Virtually all mainline Protestant denominations have developed or are in the process of developing such programs, many of which do not even require candidates to have a college degree, let alone a seminary degree. United Methodists have their Course of Study for training "local pastors," who are not given the same standing or privileges as regularly ordained Methodist clergy. Presbyterians (PCUSA) have a program for "commissioned lay pastors." The Evangelical Lutherans have an ad hoc system for designating a "program of study" for identified "indigenous leaders" that can lead to regular ordination in the church. Episcopalians also have a nonseminary path to ordination for "Canon IX clergy." In the summer of 2005, the United Church of Christ endorsed for the first time "multiple paths of preparation" for ordination, most of which do not require a seminary degree. American Baptist regional leaders have developed a three-path system leading to ordination, only one of which includes going to seminary. The irony is that while some denominations are altering their ordination requirements away from seminary education, other religious groups are moving in the opposite direction (e.g., some Pentecostals, African Americans, and other ethnic groups).

Historians will suggest that there is nothing new about these alternative paths to ordination. In fact, before seminaries were founded, such alternatives were the standard way of training ministers. In colonial times, the typical pattern for Congregationalist and Presbyterian ministers was to earn a college de-

gree in the liberal arts, remain on campus to "read divinity" for an additional year under the guidance of the college president (who was invariably a member of the clergy), then apprentice under a local pastor for another two or three years before being ordained. Where colleges were not available, they made do with local academies or "log cabin colleges" where ministry candidates studied with an accomplished pastor in the mornings, worked on the farm to earn their keep in the afternoons, and developed ministry skills by working in churches on the weekends, all under the careful supervision of their presbyteries or associations. In the early days of American Methodism, when the main model for ministry was itinerancy, ministers-in-training worked their way through a prescribed reading list and were quizzed regularly by their district superintendent or bishop to determine their progress and levels of understanding. Along the way they were carefully mentored in the ministerial arts and their spiritual unction to preach and lead effectively. This "course of study" approach remained the preferred way of training Methodist clergy well into the nineteenth century. Many Baptists wanted their ministers to have a college degree, but most were willing to settle for much less most of the time.

Slowly these patterns of ministerial formation changed. The separation of church and state, the shortage of pastors due to the successes of the Second Great Awakening, and the increasing status of the churches in American culture altered common perceptions of the Christian ministry and the methods required to train ministers. The trend was clearly toward a better educated and even professional ministry, despite the often-voiced concern that intellectual attainment and professional credentials threatened to take the place of a divine calling and gifting for ministry.[46]

Of course, that was then, and this is now. Alternate paths to ordination existed in the past because new churches needed pastors to lead them, and opportunities for a more sophisticated ministry education were few and far between. Today the needs that drive the re-adoption of these alternates are quite different. Theological schools abound, but denominations with shrinking memberships are unable to find enough ordained seminary graduates to serve in their smaller and often distressed congregations. But that is hardly the whole story: many evangelical and free-church denominations developed theological schools without eliminating their multiple-path approaches to religious leadership. The holiness and Pentecostal traditions have never required seminary education for ordination. For example, the Church of the Nazarene and the Assemblies of God provide many educational pathways to ordination, including college, Bible institutes, and variations on the old Methodist "course of study." Nazarenes and members of the Assemblies consider seminary education as the alternative, not the main or even preferred, path to ordination. Likewise, many evangelical Baptists leave the question of educational preparation for ministry up to local congregations to decide. The same patterns hold in many independent churches, where hands-on ministry experience, proven interpersonal and communication skills, and a recognized call by God supersede academic and professional credentialing.

Do these alternative programs constitute a deprofessionalization of the ministry and a lowering of ordination standards? Many (most?) seminary per-

sonnel would say so. But then they do not get to decide ordination requirements; the churches do. In contrast to the legal and medical professions, the ministry is an unregulated industry. Each denomination (and in some cases, individual congregation) makes up its own rules. For ministry candidates, there is nothing equivalent to the state bar exam or medical boards. Unlike law and medical schools, seminaries do not prepare their students to meet industrywide professional and educational standards, only those defined by their supporting church(es). Certainly schools can aim higher if they so choose, but market forces beyond their control will pull in other directions.

For that reason alone, seminaries should not be surprised when churches change their ordination requirements, even though such changes are bound to have a profound impact on theological schools. It is difficult to predict the long-term results of these alternate paths on theological education: will they work against MDiv programs? Results will undoubtedly vary.

Alternate education for effective church leadership. Regardless of whether one thinks such changes are justified or wise, it is clear that growing numbers of religious leaders no longer believe that a seminary education is necessary for effective church leadership. In fact, many are arguing that pastoral leaders are better off without it. Such views have been common in some fundamentalist, evangelical, and Pentecostal groups for a long time. But now there seems to be research to prove that it is so. In 2001 the Hartford Institute for Religion Research conducted an ambitious project that surveyed people in more than 14,000 congregations from forty-one denominations. The final report contained some deeply disturbing findings about the impact of seminary education on church life and leadership. On the positive side it observed that seminary training leads to better sermon preparation and delivery and more involvement in ecumenical worship and social ministries. But seminary education also has a negative impact on basic religious and community values. Nonseminary trained pastors are more likely to be leading churches that are "vital and alive, growing in members, using contemporary worship, clear about purpose and mission, and well organized." In an obvious understatement, the researchers concluded that "these findings would suggest the need for a careful review of the educational process of leadership preparation."[47]

For those who believe that seminary education is bad for the health of local churches, there are plenty of alternatives. Clearly, theological schools no longer corner the market on the training of religious leaders. A number of megachurches have become "teaching churches" that offer church-based theological education for lay people and continuing education for pastors. Willow Creek Community Church sponsors a number of annual conferences and training sessions that attract thousands of participants. Other nondenominational parachurch organizations put on nationally advertised conferences on various themes to help ministers and lay leaders. Thanks to the Internet, online courses and theological degree programs (often offered by unaccredited institutions) are now available at the click of a mouse. Academic resources that used to be available only in well-equipped theological libraries are now readily available on CDs or online. Educational materials for pastoral ministry are now accessible to everyone with a computer anytime and anywhere in

the world. In short, large parts of the theological education market have been "globalized." To paraphrase the title and main point of Thomas Friedman's recent best seller, thanks to technology and the explosion of educational resources, the world of theological education is flat.[48]

Of course, defenders of graduate theological education will insist that such on-demand ministerial training does not measure up to their offerings; and it is difficult to argue with such an assessment. Now more than ever, ministerial students need the time and guided reflection to acquire the knowledge and discernment to become effective leaders of religious communities. One simply cannot attain such things in short spurts or weekend exposures. Face-to-face encounters in ongoing scholarly communities are still the best way to prepare leaders in changing and difficult times. That much seems both self-evident and provable to seminary administrators, faculty, and alumni who look back on their theological education with gratitude and appreciation.

But such notions are far from universal. Many critics insist that theological schools are not producing the kinds of pastors lay people want. While lay people say they want well-educated and theologically informed pastors, they also desire leaders who have interpersonal and communication skills, the ability to lead a complex organization and handle conflict management, and the personal resources and stamina to guide the congregation through the tough process of spiritual and institutional renewal.[49] Increasingly, result-oriented churches want to hire pastors who "know *what* to do and *how* to do it," regardless of their educational backgrounds or denominational credentials.[50]

A common complaint is that seminaries are not producing such well-balanced and multitasked ministers because their faculties are more interested in scholarship than in matters of faith or practical ministry. A recent Auburn Center study of theological faculties paints a much more complicated picture. While personal religious adherence and leadership in worship and church life by faculty remain high, in the last decade, seminary faculty and those in doctoral programs preparing for teaching in theological schools are less likely to be ordained ministers and more likely to describe their own field as religious studies rather than theological studies. Some observers see such trends as potentially harmful to the curriculum's focus on ministerial formation; but not all analysts agree. Possibly more significant is the way seminary faculties understand their own role and priorities in the educational process. Faculties in evangelical schools tend to emphasize content, the integration of academic and ministry studies, and spiritual formation and see themselves as representatives of a particular religious tradition. Mainline Protestant faculties tend to emphasize critical and theological thinking and see themselves as representatives of particular academic disciplines. Roman Catholic faculties seek to balance their teaching and research roles and to integrate the academic, ministerial, and formational parts of the curriculum.[51] The study was correct to conclude that "theological schools' faculties are one of the greatest strengths of theological schools" and to voice concern about their growing tendency to "privilege the study of religion and marginalize theological commitments."[52] Such observations underscore the concerns of many rank-and-file lay people and church leaders who have already started to look elsewhere for their pastors.

The slow pace of institutional change. Theological schools like to see themselves as agents of prophetic change; but institutionally most of them are quite conservative and resist significant change. "The structures, work patterns, and operating values of theological schools are anchored in tradition and continuity. In most instances, they remain the same for long periods or change very, very slowly."[53] This means that most theological schools will find it difficult to adjust to the new religious ecology in which they live. A comparison of the new religious networks and theological schools is quite instructive. Networks are about change, quick response, creative alternatives, new models, and the like. In comparison, theological schools are slow and measured in the face of new developments and reticent to embrace too much innovation too soon, thanks in large part to deeply embedded values of shared governance, which to movers-and-shakers can appear glacial and cumbersome. A case in point: with much good faith and intentionality, theological schools committed themselves to greater racial and gender diversity decades ago, but the pace of change has been painfully slow. Theological schools are about "a long obedience in the same direction,"[54] while the new religious networks are about quick response. Unfortunately, many seminaries do not have much time to warm up to the new environment.

In his recent book, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, Jared Diamond explains why even complex groups fail to respond to problems that eventually do them in. The reasons are many. One group fails to anticipate an approaching problem and is quickly overwhelmed by it when it arrives. Another group sees the problem coming but fails to diagnose it properly because it lacks the necessary technical skills or competent leadership to do so. Still another group understands the nature of the problem well enough but does not even try to solve it because of internal conflicts of interest, ideological thinking that refuses to challenge old convictions, assumptions, or ways of doing things, or simple psychological denial. Finally, a group may sincerely try to address the problem but fail because the solution is way beyond its present capability or resources.[55]

Fortunately, theological schools have proven themselves to be quite resilient institutions; but it is not difficult to imagine how at least some schools might fail to address the challenges facing them for the reasons listed above. A few seminaries may already resonate with the opening line of Woody Allen's often-quoted commencement address: "More than any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly."[56] Most schools are a long way from Allen's fork in the road and still have time to make constructive adjustments. But time is on nobody's side in the long run.

Opportunities for the development of new partnerships

What follows are suggestions or possibilities, not well-thought-out proposals, since the purpose of this project is to encourage members of the Association to discover solutions through a collaborative process. Hopefully, these suggestions may point the conversation in fruitful directions.

Finding new ways to relate to each other. Schools and churches already relate to each other at various levels. Most schools work closely with local congregations through their field education or internship programs. But some schools have involved pastors and lay leaders in new mentoring programs for their students. Denver Seminary, for example, has more than 1,000 "certified" church-based mentors who join with faculty in helping students set academic, ministerial, and spiritual goals, then evaluate their progress. Such a collaborative approach to mentoring not only helps students integrate academic and ministry studies but also creates strong relationships of loyalty and support within existing church communities, which, given the changes in older denominational support, may be essential to the survival of many schools. According to Lynn and Wheeler, "More and more, students and financial support will be drawn from churches and individuals who know the school firsthand, often because they are nearby. . . even if they are not members of your immediate religious family."[57] Discovering and intensifying such relationships are going to be more important than ever before.

In addition, it might be possible for some theological schools to partner with those "teaching churches" whose human and financial resources are substantial. Some seminaries have already started to offer regular courses in conjunction with conferences and other events sponsored by such churches. As participating schools have discovered, teaching churches possess significant expertise and workable models that can contribute significantly to the training of effective leaders. Possibly other churches without the same kinds of resources could be included as well. Into these new partnerships schools can bring their gifts of discernment, theological analysis, and the perspective that comes with the serious study of Scripture, tradition, theology, ethics, and the like.

Most important, schools and churches can collaborate in setting (and carrying out) the educational and formational agenda for ministerial students. Most faculties and administrators in theological schools would profit greatly by regularly listening to pastors talk about their work. If seminaries are really interested in discovering what transformational leadership means in local congregations, all they have to do is ask the men and women who have demonstrated such giftedness. Chances are good they know. Of course, both sides will have to take each other seriously and work hard to alleviate some of the disconnects that currently keep churches and schools apart.

Supporting the mission of local churches. According to the conventional wisdom of the 1960s and '70s, the minister's job was to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. Such advice made sense when so many congregations were "fat and sassy" and enjoying the benefits of social privilege and ample resources. Today the situation is different, with an abundance of fragile and struggling congregations that seem to lack the human and spiritual resources to succeed. What can seminaries do to promote the revitalization and renewal of such churches? How can they help their students become more effective leaders for change? It is not unreasonable to ask another tough question: What were the seminaries and their graduates doing while so many denominations and congregations were suffering from a lack of mission, unclear identity, or public scandal?

Of course, that last question might imply that theological schools somehow exist above or outside the prevailing religious ecology. The real relationship between school and church is always reciprocal: under the best conditions, schools shape the religious ecology and are shaped by it. No theological school, especially those with denominational ties, can expect to fly above the storm when the winds of controversy blow hard. It works both ways: as the seminaries go, so go the churches; and as the churches go, so go the seminaries.

One promising approach in helping churches is the application of missiology to North American church life. Missional churches and their leaders seek to understand how best to engage and evangelize unchurched people in a culture that no longer privileges organized religion or the Christian faith. In short, to be effective, ministers in the current North American religious landscape need to know how to move beyond the mindset and practices of "Christendom" in order to think and act like cross-cultural missionaries. Such ministers are able to analyze their context and develop theologically informed and culturally relevant strategies to reach it. This missional approach will actively challenge the effects of "lay liberalism" and replace it with a clear and compelling articulation of the Christian gospel.[58] No seminary can effectively educate missional leaders without being missional itself. The commitment to local church ministry will have to permeate all parts of the curriculum, not just the ministry courses. Thus an important question: can the training or orientation of current or future theological faculties support such a missional emphasis?

Rethinking the mission of theological schools. Possibly the biggest issue facing theological schools is the question of their own mission. To use the language of the marketplace: what business are theological schools in? Do they exist to provide professional education for ordained clergy and theological scholars; or are they in the business of providing theological education for the church? In light of the changing religious ecology, can theological schools afford to maintain their mission of educating professional ministers much longer?

If schools decide in favor of the second alternative, they will need to adjust their missions, programs, and resources to include other emphases: lay and continuing education, nondegree certificate programs, and short-term programs to meet special needs. Here ATS will need to help its member schools find ways to react strategically and quickly to new opportunities, to act more like members of a network than typical educational bureaucracies. Without the ability to think and move fast, many schools will find opportunities passing them by. For example, there is the fast approaching wave of baby boomer retirees who will have the time and the means to devote to lay ministry; and there will be many opportunities to contribute to alternative paths to ordination if schools can respond quickly enough with new kinds of delivery systems. For Roman Catholics, seminaries need to add to their primary task of priestly formation the task of developing new programs to support the credentialing of parish directors and pastoral associates who are now carrying most of the pastoral load in local parishes. Up to now, most of that work has been done by Catholic colleges and universities. Such changes would demonstrate the commitment of theological schools to assist local church ministry in new and creative ways.

Recognizing reasons to change. Making such institutional changes will require the support of seminary faculty, many of whom already feel stretched to the limit. As a result, proposals for developing new partnerships or reconfiguring resources and programs may not be welcome or even seem remotely possible. Like it or not, faculties are usually not willing to consider such change unless there is an overwhelming and unavoidable reason to do so. Without a sense of impending crisis, most seminary personnel prefer to stand pat.

Such reticence is not unreasonable given the fact that senior administrators and trustees come and go, but faculties tend to endure forever. No one has more at stake in preserving and defending the institutional culture than those who have to live in it over the long haul. Nevertheless, the faculty's view of the institution often is narrowly focused and does not include all the elements needed to plot a future course of action. Such matters usually fall to senior administrators and trustees. The situation calls for collaboration.

One of the most difficult tasks for trustees, administrators, and faculty is agreeing on the nature of reality. What is really going on here? What is the nature of the problems we face? What's the relationship between external and internal challenges? What strategies are most appropriate, given who we are and the resources that are available to us? Which core values are *really* non-negotiable and which might be expendable to ensure the future? Unless the seminary's crucial "stakeholders" can arrive at similar answers to these questions, progress will be impossible.

Maybe this is the best place to start: by doing a sophisticated assessment about where one's school fits in the current religious environment. Each school is different; no two schools have the same history, resources, or constituency. Some schools are already on the edge of the abyss and will have to take drastic action to survive (merge with another institution, sell parts or all of their current campus to reduce expenses, or adopt other draconian measures), while others, thanks be to God, cannot even see the abyss from their present location. Even so, it will be difficult and dangerous to ignore the present challenges for long.

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ENDNOTES

1. Daniel O. Aleshire, "Theological Schools and the Church: Finding a Future Together" (plenary address, ATS Biennial Meeting, June 26, 2004).

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5. John Tracy Ellis, *Essays in Seminary Education* (Notre Dame, IN: Fides Publishers, 1967), 59–223. Joseph M. O'Keefe, *Catholic Education at the Turn of the New Century*, reprint ed. (New York, NY: Garland Press, 1997).

6. Conrad Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995); William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1982); George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925*, reprint ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1982).

7. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary was the only charter member of ATS that would not currently fit the "mainline" description.

8. From 1960 to 1990, 105 schools became members of ATS: twenty were mainline Protestant, forty-seven were Roman Catholic, and thirty-eight were evangelical. See Jesse H. Ziegler, *ATS Through Two Decades: Reflections on Theological Education, 1960–1980* (Vandalia, OH: The Association of Theological Schools, 1984). See also Timothy P. Weber, "New Dimensions in American Evangelical Theology: The Mainstreaming of Evangelical Theological Education," *New Dimensions in Evangelical Thought: Essays in Honor of Millard J. Erickson*, David S. Dockery, ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 148–183.

9. A number of evangelical denominations follow this practice as a way to maintain the church's doctrine and ethos. One such example is North Park Theological Seminary of the Evangelical Covenant Church. After going through the school-run search process, the presidential candidate must be voted on by delegates at the church's annual meeting; and, after going through the standard faculty-led search process, all regular, tenure track faculty nominees must be interviewed by the ECC's Board of the Ordered Ministry, affirmed by the Ministerium (comprised of all ordained Covenant clergy), and voted on at the annual meeting. Even non-Covenant faculty candidates must go through this process.

10. Phyllis Anderson, "Report of Study of ATS Schools Related to Multiple Denominations," January 5, 2005.

11. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "Eleven Imperatives for Theological Education" (Chicago, IL: ELCA, 1993).

12. Katarina Schuth, *Seminaries, Theologates, and the Future of Church Ministry: An Analysis of Trends and Transitions* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 245–248.

13. Ibid. See also Dean R. Hoge and Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Evolving Visions of the Priesthood: Changes from Vatican II to the Turn of the New Century* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003).

14. For example, George Fox Evangelical Seminary is recognized by four denominations (Evangelical Church of North America, Evangelical Friends, Free Methodist Church, and Wesleyan Methodist Church) even though it is officially nondenominational. The Haggard School of Theology at Azusa Pacific University has similar connections with a number of Quaker and Wesleyan/holiness denominations.

15. An optimistic, professional model of ministry is clearly evident in two significant mid-twentieth century studies: H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and its Ministry: Reflections on the Aims of Theological Education* (New York, NY: Harper, 1956), and H. Richard Niebuhr, Daniel Day Williams, and James M. Gustafson, *The Advancement of Theological Education* (New York, NY: Harper, 1957).

16. Most of the statistics in this section are from ATS's 2004–2005 Annual Data Tables.

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19. Peter Steinfels, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2003).

20. Compare Martin Bradley, et al., *Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1990* (Atlanta, GA: Glenmary Research Center, 1992) and Dale Jones, et al., *Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States 2000* (Atlanta, GA: Glenmary Research Center, 2002).

21. See *American Religion Data Archives*, Religious Congregations and Memberships Maps and Reports, www.thearda.com.

22. Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith since World War II* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

23. Philip Hammond, *Religion and Personal Autonomy: The Third Disestablishment in America* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1992). See also Robert N. Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985).

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28. Benton Johnson, Dean R. Hoge, and Donald A. Luidens, "Mainline Churches: The Real Reason for Decline," *First Things*, 31 (March 1993):13–18.

29. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks, eds., *The Mainstream Protestant "Decline": The Presbyterian Pattern* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press,

1990); Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks, *Vital Signs: The Promise of Mainstream Protestantism* (Grand Haven, MI: FaithWalk Publishing, 2002). See also Wade Clarke Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987); Dean R. Hoge, Benton Johnson, and Donald A. Luidens, *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994).

30. The best overview of these tensions is Steinfels, *A People Adrift*. See also Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002); Joseph Bernardin and Oscar H. Lipscomb, *Catholic Common Ground Initiative* (New York, NY: Crossroad Pub., 1997); William V. D'Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Katherine Meyer, *American Catholics: Gender, Generation, and Commitment* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Pess, 2001); and Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995).

31. The literature on evangelical religion is voluminous. Here is a sampling. D.G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004); George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991); Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Mark A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001); Jim Wallis, *God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It* (San Francisco: HarperSanFranciso, 2005); and Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

32. This observation comes from Edith Blumhofer, director of the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, Wheaton College, March 17, 2006.

33. Nancy T. Ammerman, "New life for denominationalism," *The Christian Century,* March 15, 2000, also available at http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/ammerman_article3.html. See also Adair T. Lummis, "Brand Name Identity in a Post-Denominational Age: Regional Leaders' Perspectives on Its Importance for Churches" (paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Columbus, Ohio, October 2001) also available online at http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/lummis_article1.html.

34. David A. Roozen, "Oldline Protestantism: Pockets of Vitality Within a Continuing Stream of Decline," Hartford Institute for Religion Working Paper 1104.1 (Hartford, CT: Hartford Seminary, 2004). It is accessible online at http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/roozen_article5.html. Diana Butler Bass, *The Practicing Congregation: Imagining a New Old Church* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004); and Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995).

35. See Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003); Leonard Sweet, gen. ed., *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003); Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999); and Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

36. Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999).

37. Scott Thumma, "What God Makes Free is Free Indeed: Nondenominational Church Identity and its Networks of Support," Hartford Institute for Religion Research, October 1999, accessible online at http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/thumma_article5.html.

See also Scott Thummas and Dave Travis, *Beyond Megachurch Myths: What We Can Learn from America's Largest Churches* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

38. James T. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998). For a study of surviving "feeder schools," see Robert Benne, *Quality with Soul: How Six Premier Colleges and Universities Keep Faith with Their Religious Traditions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001).

39. Barbara G. Wheeler, *Is There a Problem? Theological Students and Religious Leadership for the Future*, Auburn Studies, no. 8 (New York, NY: Auburn Theological Seminary, July 2001), 3.

40. A number of articles in the April 4, 2004, issue of the *Courier-Journal* of Louisville, Kentucky, provided the following statistics: Within the PCUSA, one in three congregations (i.e., 4,000 parishes) is without a full-time ordained pastor; one out of five congregations in Reformed Church of America and the ELCA congregations is without permanent pastoral leadership; and one out of ten of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod's 6,000 congregations is without a full-time ordained pastor.

41. Patricia M. Y. Chang, "Assessing the Clergy Supply in the 21st Century," *Pulpit & Pew Research Reports* (Durham, NC: Duke Divinity School, 2004).

42. Quotations are from "Empty Pulpits: Ranks of Pastors Dwindling," *Courier-Journal,* April 4, 2004.

43. Wheeler, *Is There A Problem?*, 3.

44. "Empty Pulpits," *Courier-Journal.*

45. Anthony Ruger, *Lean Years Fat Years: Changes in the Financial Support of Protestant Theological Education*, Auburn Studies, no. 2 (New York, NY: Auburn Theological Seminary, December 1994), 3. See also Anthony Ruger, *Seek and Find? Revenues in Theological Education*, Auburn Studies, no. 11 (New York, NY: Auburn Theological Seminary, April 2005).

46. Fraser, *Schooling the Preachers.* Donald M. Scott, *From Office to Profession: The New England Ministry, 1750–1850* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978).

47. Carl S. Dudley and David A. Roozen, *Faith Communities Today: A Report on Religion in the United States Today* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Seminary, March 2001).

48. Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

49. Adair T. Lummis, "What Do Lay People Want in Pastors? Answers from Lay Search Committee Chairs and Regional Judicatory Leaders," *Pulpit and Pew Research Reports* (Durham, NC: Duke Divinity School, 2003). See also Carl S. Dudley and David A. Roozen, *Faith Communities Today* (Hartford, CT: Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2001) for an examination of similar issues.

50. In March 2006, the ATS task force working on this project listened to a gathering of successful mainline Protestant, Pentecostal, evangelical, and Roman Catholic pastors reflecting on these issues. A number of the pastors admitted to hiring experienced and result-oriented ministers from other traditions or acting outside of normal denominational procedures to ordain qualified lay ministers who had proven themselves to be effective church leaders.

51. Barbara G. Wheeler, Sharon L. Miller, and Katarina Schuth, *Signs of the Times: Present and Future Theological Faculty*, Auburn Studies, no. 10 (New York, NY: Auburn Theological Seminary, February 2005).

52. Ibid., 25, 26.

53. Ibid., 4.

54. The phrase is taken from Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, 20th anniversary ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

55. Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2005), 419–440.

56. Woody Allen, "My Speech to the Graduates," *Side Effects* (NY: Ballantine Books, 1980), 79–85.

57. Lynn and Wheeler, *Missing Connections*, 22.

58. Especially helpful on the "missional church" are Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998); Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000); George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, eds., *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996); Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership, and Liminality* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997).