
Teaching Churches

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Introduction

One hears a lot of talk about the "teaching church" these days. Although many people use the term, they do not always mean the same thing, since the term is somewhat ambiguous. Religious educators hear the term as a reference to the congregation's teaching ministry. "The Congregation as Educator" was the theme of the 1996 joint meeting of the Religious Education Association and Association of Professors and Researchers in Religious Education. There, the concept of the teaching church was associated with Christian education.

For others, however, the concept "teaching church" is associated with equipping men and women for ordination to the ministry of Word and sacrament. These individuals would be surprised to find that Christian education rather than theological education is the subject of Eugene Roehlkepartain's *The Teaching Church*.¹ But even within the context of theological education the term has different meanings.

For some, the teaching church is a synonym for what seminaries once called field education, or supervised ministry. For others, it refers to a new paradigm for theological education in which the primary locus of equipping for ministry shifts from the seminary to the congregation.

Understanding the teaching church in relation to a new vision for theological education is based on a critique of traditional seminary education. In this view, seminaries emphasize academic subjects and scholarship and are no longer in touch with the church's needs. Thus, they produce graduates who are not equipped to meet contemporary challenges.²

Criticism of seminaries' emphasis on cognitive content and intellectual discipline is not new. Thirty years ago Carroll Wise put the issue this way: "How, in an atmosphere of scholarship, can the student gain a positive basis for identity as a pastor?" Wise observed, "Intellectual discipline should be one aspect of the pastor's training, but by itself it is insufficient for his needs."³

This paper seeks to explore the concept of the teaching church in the context of theological education and the equipping of men and women for the ministry of Word and Sacrament. Because of the different understandings described above, the paper begins with an exploration of historical perspectives as a way of tracing the contours of this emerging approach in theological education; then shifts to the field of adult education and its contribution to the concept of the teaching church; and finally, the paper identifies challenges presented by the

teaching church concept and offers an assessment of its potential contribution to theological education.

Historical Perspectives

In September of 1995, the Theological Education Agency (TEA) of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and the Emmanuel Reformed Church of Paramount, California, sponsored a conference on the teaching church. The conference was attended by RCA pastors, regional synod staff, and seminary faculty. Speakers ranged from the president of Fuller Theological Seminary to new church development pastors. They outlined the contours of the changing context for ministry, the implications for congregations of a new understanding of the North American continent as a mission field, and the call for a new kind of pastoral leadership for missionary churches poised on the threshold of the twenty-first century.

Another conference on the teaching church was sponsored by Western Theological Seminary in the spring of 1996. Participants in this conference explored the teaching church model in workshops, forums, and small group discussions as well as through a panel presentation and lectures. This conference sought to affirm teaching church congregations and pastor-mentors in their partnership with the seminary and to help them gain new knowledge, sharpen supervisory skills, and engage an emerging vision for the future of ministerial formation. But the conference was also designed to assist Western Seminary in identifying and equipping potential teaching churches and pastoral mentors, and to assist the RCA in exploring the possibilities of this model in relation to the future of ministerial formation.

These two conferences provided pastors, denominational leaders, and seminary faculty with an opportunity to reflect on the current pattern of preparing men and women for ministry and to explore the possibilities of the teaching church model. Lessons from these conferences include: (1) the recognition that the context of ministry—North American culture, which Stephen L. Carter has described as "a culture of disbelief"⁴—is a mission field and that Christian churches are called to be missionary congregations; (2) the acknowledgment that this new situation demands a different kind of pastoral leadership for the twenty-first century church; and (3) the conviction that traditional forms of ministerial preparation are not particularly well-suited to equip men and women for the challenges of ministry and mission as the North American church moves into the next century. Most important, perhaps, is the recognition that congregations are a vital resource for equipping men and women for the ministry of Word and sacrament and that to make better use of the formative character of congregations, seminaries need to rethink their relationship to the church.

In spite of the excitement and enthusiasm about the teaching church, the concept is not exactly new. In fact, the basic notion of immersing Master of Divinity (M.Div.) candidates in the practice of ministry has been a key element in theological education for a long time. It has been part of the standards for the M.Div. degree of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) and remains part of the newly revised standards (1996). Theological reflection and supervised experience are integral to equipping men and women for ministry:

A.3.1.4 *Capacity for Ministerial and Public Leadership:* The program shall provide theological reflection on and education for the practice of ministry. These activities should cultivate the capacity for leadership in both ecclesial and public contexts.

A.3.1.4.3 The program shall provide opportunities for education through supervised experiences in ministry. These experiences should be of sufficient duration and intensity to provide opportunity to gain expertise in the tasks of ministerial leadership within both the congregation and the broader public context, and to reflect on interrelated theological, cultural, and experiential learning.⁵

At Western Seminary, there have been changes in the shape of supervised ministry over the last three decades. Field Education during the sixties emphasized the field or place of ministry while Supervised Ministry of the eighties emphasized supervision. In 1990-1991, Dean of Students John E. Schmidt led Western Seminary's faculty in developing Formation for Ministry, an effort to reshape the role of the supervised ministry in theological education for the nineties. As in the past, supervision remained a central component in Formation for Ministry. M.Div. candidates engaged in the practice of ministry through concurrent assignments in congregations and other ministry settings under the supervision of experienced pastors. Mentoring language replaced the terminology of supervision, although the mentors clearly retained a supervisory function.

In Formation for Ministry, M.Div. candidates also met weekly in small groups called "colloquies" to reflect on their experience in their ministry settings. These colloquy groups were led by pastors who were equipped to guide theological reflection on the practice of ministry. Like the concurrent assignments in which candidates engaged during the academic year, the full-time summer and year-long internships of Supervised Ministry became important components of Formation for Ministry.

Recently, Western Seminary added an important new element. M.Div. candidates are now required to participate in an intercultural immersion. For some, this meant spending ten to fourteen days in El Salvador, Nicaragua, or Mexico, where issues of peace and justice, or mission and evangelism, could be

explored through the fresh lenses offered by a culture other than their own. For others, immersions in Roman or Greek cultures afford the opportunity to focus on ecumenical issues. The intercultural immersions reflect the growing awareness of the importance of globalization for theological education among ATS schools in the late eighties and early nineties.

Western Seminary's faculty is now developing a new M.Div. curriculum in which "ministry learning units" will provide the kind of theological reflection and supervised experience required by the new ATS standards. Ministry learning units are

. . . self-designed learning experiences executed within the context of actual ministry settings. They direct the student's learning toward specific goals in defined areas of ministerial competency. They represent a learning alliance between the student, peers, a mentor, and the director of the learning unit. The *director* interprets the goals of the learning unit, provides instruction, resources, support and guidance for the design of the learning unit by the student, and is responsible for the final evaluation and grading of the completed project for the unit. *Peers* make up a community of learning which provides feedback, assessment, encouragement to individual learners as they design and complete their learning units. *Mentors* supervised the ministry experiences which are part of the learning unit. They also assist as resource persons in the design of the learning unit proposal, and in the execution and evaluation of the learning process. The *student* is ultimately responsible for designing and completing a learning unit proposal which fulfills the requirements of the unit design, in the context of a ministry setting. Utilizing the theoretical framework and goals of the learning unit design, the student defines specific goals, learning strategies, ministry experiences, and assessment strategies which will further their own preparation for the specific kind of ministry to which they are called by God. All learning units are overseen and coordinated by the *Coordinator of Formation for Ministry*, who assists the students in locating appropriate ministry settings, approves all learning unit proposals, and facilitates the learning alliances among students, unit directors, peers, and mentors.⁶

In 1996, an RCA General Synod task force presented a report which incorporated the new teaching church concept into the denomination's standards for the preparation of men and women for the ministry of Word and Sacrament:

The Teaching Church Program in the RCA is intended to provide candidates for the ordained ministry with a parish-based, in-ministry experience as part of the ministry preparation process. It places candidates in local congregational settings where there is a mutual effort among the candidate, pastoral staff, laypersons, and seminary faculty to equip and prepare the candidate.⁷

The report calls teaching churches to provide:

1. A setting for candidates to assess their learning needs and test their ministry skills.
2. A contract for reimbursed ministry time in accordance with the candidate's personal and seminary schedule.
3. A variety of ministry opportunities and exposure to the many functions of ministry.
4. A thorough evaluation of candidates through interviews with both staff and members prior to acceptance by the church to determine potential for a good match.
5. Training to RCA candidates in cooperation with the Candidate Care Committee (CCC) and classis.⁸

What is new in the emerging concept of the teaching church is the shift of the primary center for ministerial preparation from the academy to the congregation. If the teaching church as field education or supervised ministry in traditional ministerial preparation was a small addition to course work and classroom instruction, the new concept gives larger space and greater attention to ministerial preparation in ministry settings.

While this shift may seem a radical departure from traditional seminary training, it is not the first time such a radical proposal has been made. In *The Meaning of Pastoral Care*, Carroll Wise, then professor of pastoral psychology and counseling at Garrett Biblical Institute, proposed that,

Teacher, student, and layman need to become involved in a living encounter in the task of theological education. Curriculum and teaching should be organized around the experience of the student and teacher in actual parish situations, with actual persons. This calls for a radical departure from the present methods of the seminary. The new approach would go far beyond what is usually called "field work," since it would include all departments.⁹

Wise advocated more than an increase in the amount of church experience seminarians would receive as part of their preparation for ministry. He envisioned that seminary professors would also be pastors—on a part-time

basis—serving in congregations. Wise observed that "The seminary today has identified itself with the academy—and the teacher with the academician—rather than with the profession for which it is seeking to train men. This is the situation which needs to be modified."¹⁰

According to Wise, "Many students today are getting experience in student charges, but they do not have the foggiest idea of how to relate their 'experience' to their studies in the seminary."¹¹ He noted the dependence of students on their teachers, and their inability to use imagination. The integration of theological reflection with the practice of ministry and the capacity for creative imagination in the practice of ministry were central to Wise's proposal, a proposal based on the model of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE).¹²

For Wise, the goal of theological education was to graduate men and women who combined the qualities of "scholar" and "saint." By saint, Wise meant

a person who is growing in genuine love toward God and man, who is honestly trying to cope with the conditions in himself which are obstacles to such love, and who is able and willing to use professional services to this end. . . . He is not only a man who "knows" in the sense of scholarship, but he knows in the sense of the ability to enter directly and deeply into the experiences of others.¹³

In the early seventies, Western Seminary attempted something along the lines Wise advocated. Individual faculty were assigned to a congregation (i.e., a teaching church), along with a team of seminarians. They worked together in the congregation, leading worship, teaching Sunday school classes, providing pastoral care, and sharing leadership responsibilities. In these teaching churches of the seventies, pastors, laypersons, seminarians, and professors were engaged in praxis, a combination of the practice of ministry and of critical theological reflection on their action. Timothy L. Brown, now Henry Bast Professor of Preaching at Western Seminary, remembers the formative influence of the experience of participating in one of these teaching church teams with his professor and mentor, Richard C. Oudersluys, then Anton Biemolt Professor of New Testament. Donald J. Bruggink, James A.H. Cornell Professor of Historical Theology at Western, has similar positive memories, but from a faculty perspective. For Bruggink, seeing professors as models of the pastorate rather than the professorate was one the values of this teaching church model.

Not only did this approach allow seminarians to see their professors as models of the pastorate rather than the professorate, it also fostered the development of peer relationships between faculty and seminarians. Both professor and seminarians practiced ministry in the congregation under the leadership of the pastor. This model of the teaching church addressed issues of

pastoral identity, the relevance of scholarship, and ministerial competence with which Carroll Wise and others were wrestling in the sixties.

If this model of the teaching church was so promising, why is it no longer part of the M.Div. curriculum at Western Seminary? First, because the seventies model had added responsibilities to faculty teaching loads without making adjustments in their overall workload, burnout contributed to the abandonment of this model. Second, the pastoral leadership and ministry setting of the teaching church were not always of high quality. A third possible factor, which might have come into play in time was that the teaching church experience was insufficiently integrated with the rest of the M.Div. curriculum. These factors may be instructive for those who are now shaping a new model of the teaching church.

Educational Perspectives

The field of adult education offers some helpful insights for thinking about theological education for ministers. The concept of andragogy, the notion of professionals as reflective practitioners, and a problem-posing approach to education lend support to the emerging teaching church model for theological education.

Andragogy

A commonly accepted doctrine of adult education is that adults do not learn in the same way children learn. One characteristic of adult learning, according to this assumption, is that adult learning is goal-oriented and problem-centered. Adults engage in learning in order to achieve a particular goal (to become an ordained minister of Word and Sacrament), or to solve a particular problem (how to minister to a person dying of cancer).

The leading proponent of this view is Malcolm S. Knowles.¹⁴ He defines andragogy as "the art and science of helping adults learn."¹⁵ According to Knowles, adults tend "to enter an educational activity in a *problem-centered* frame of mind." Their perspective is one of "immediacy of application." Children, on the other hand, enter an educational activity in a "*subject-centered* frame of mind."¹⁶ The teaching church model places seminarians in a learning context that is problem-centered. Given the assignment to assist with Sunday morning liturgy, Diane engages her assignment in a problem-solving mode: "What hymns are most appropriate given the biblical texts and the pastor's sermon theme?" "What pastoral concerns need to be mentioned in the congregational prayer?" "Should I write a responsive prayer of confession for the worship bulletin, when this congregation is not accustomed to printed prayers that call for a congregational response?"

Of course, Diane may be drawing on previous knowledge from a seminary course in public worship. But her use of that knowledge is more in terms of

application than disconnected bits of information. She scans her memory in search of relevant information and draws on only that course content which applies to her present situation.

Readiness to learn is another aspect of Knowles' understanding of learning in adulthood.¹⁷ In the pastoral care course, Mark takes notes on how to conduct a funeral service. But never having experienced the death of a family member or close friend, and never having been to a funeral home, Mark's lecture notes are filed away for future use. Mark knows this body of information will be important for ministry someday, but he is not engaged very much with the lecture subject at this point.

Then, one day during his year-long internship, Mark receives a call from a distraught parent whose ten-year-old daughter has been struck by a speeding car and killed. The need to learn is suddenly and tragically present. Mark wants to know what to do. He remembers his class notes and pulls them from the file. Some of the notes are indeed helpful, but other notes seem vague and confusing. Mark is now ready to learn about pastoral care in relation to death, grief, and conducting a funeral service in a way that he was not when he was a student in class. Knowles calls this a "teachable moment,"¹⁸ and others would see Mark's "readiness to learn" in the light of the biblical notion of *kairos*.

Knowing-in-Action and The Reflective Practitioner

Another more recent contribution from the field of adult education has been made by MIT professor Donald A. Schön.¹⁹ Schön's work centers on the distinction between two kinds of professional knowledge: technical rationality and knowing-in-action. Technical rationality, "the dominant model of professional knowledge" according to Schön, is rooted in Enlightenment ideas and Positivist assumptions about knowing and knowledge.²⁰ In this model of professional knowledge, professional practice focuses on solving problems.²¹ Schön writes:

Technical rationality holds that practitioners are instrumental problem solvers who select technical means best suited to particular purposes. Rigorous professional practitioners solve well-formed instrumental problems by applying theory and technique derived from systematic, preferably scientific knowledge²²

The professional moves from a "scientific" body of knowledge—say, pastoral care or biblical exegesis—and applies that theoretical and technical knowledge to solve a particular problem, such as counseling a couple whose marriage is failing or preparing to preach a sermon on Philippians 1:1-11.

The model of technical rationality used in architecture, psychotherapy, and other professions, has been challenged. Schön and others have discerned flaws

and weaknesses in it. For one thing, the focus on problem solving does not give adequate attention to the problem context. A textbook solution often fails to take into account a particular situation.²³ Technical rationality does not work very well in indeterminate zones of practice, where the situation is more gray than black-and-white.²⁴

These indeterminate zones of practice—uncertainty, uniqueness, and value conflict—escape the canons of technical rationality. When a problematic situation is uncertain, technical problem solving depends on the prior construction of a well-formed problem—which is not itself a technical task. When a practitioner recognizes a situation as unique, she cannot handle it solely by applying theories or techniques derived from her store of professional knowledge. And in situations of value conflict, there are no clear and self-consistent ends to guide the technical selection of means.²⁵

Theological education, like much American higher education, has been strongly influenced by the model of technical rationality.²⁶ Seminary students learn textbook answers to the problems of ministry. They are expected to apply these solutions to the problems they encounter in ministry. However, the textbook solutions do not always apply to every pastoral situation. This is where seminary graduates often become "stuck."

Schön describes a contrasting way of knowing, which he names knowing-in-action or reflection-in-action:

When we go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life, we show ourselves to be knowledgeable in a special way. Often we cannot say what it is that we know. When we try to describe it we find ourselves at a loss, or we produce descriptions that are obviously inappropriate. Our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is *in* our action.²⁷

Reflecting on action makes explicit what has been known tacitly and implicitly. Schön writes: "It is the entire process of reflection-in-action which is central to the 'art' by which practitioners sometimes deal well with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict."²⁸

Several theological educators have begun to apply Schön's concept of the reflective practitioner to ministry.²⁹ "Formal education can help by introducing students to some of the tools available to refine common sense, but reflective

practice guided by experienced reflective practitioners is primary," writes John B. Cobb, Jr.³⁰

Schön's work is especially relevant to the concept of the teaching church. The best way to prepare men and women to face situations in ministry which have not been addressed by seminary textbooks or covered by seminary courses is to engage them in the practice of ministry under the supervision of a trained mentor who can help them reflect critically on their engagement with pastoral care, preaching, teaching, and leadership. At their best, this is what field education in the sixties, supervised ministry in the eighties, and formation for ministry in the nineties tried to accomplish. It is what Western Seminary's faculty hopes the emerging model of the teaching church as embodied in the learning units of the new M.Div. curriculum will accomplish for the next generation of M.Div. candidates.

The importance of Schön's work extends beyond the ministerial formation of M.Div. candidates to the practice of ministry by those ordained to the ministry of Word and sacrament. Ministry presents ministers daily with new challenges, issues, and problems which were neither covered in seminary courses nor addressed by textbooks. Learning for ministry is lifelong. Cobb argues that "we need an image of the minister as a reflective practitioner."³¹

Problem-Based Learning

Several people have compared the preparation for ministry with the preparation for the medical profession. As medical students combine course work with internships and residencies, so ministerial students combine academic study with supervised ministry.

Problem-based learning is a new approach to training physicians. Howard Barrows, chair of the medical education department at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois, notes that it is only in school that students can expect to be given all the information required to solve a problem. Only in school, he argues, can they expect there to be a correct solution to a given problem. Problems that are well-structured do not stimulate self-directed learning. Instead, Barrows advocates ill-structured problems, in which students are given only enough information to get their exploration started. "When students grapple with open-ended problems, they discover what it is they need to know in order to propose a solution," says Barrow.³²

The first problem-based medical school curriculum was developed by Barrows and others at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada, in the early seventies. Now more than sixty medical schools in the United States use problem-based learning. The concept of an "ill-defined problem" also has promise for the preparation of ministers. Cobb writes,

Every congregation is different, and there is no way that seminary graduates can gain an adequate understanding of

congregations by studying them in academic courses. Coming to understand congregations is a part of the lifetime work of reflective practitioners.³³

This approach to teaching is in stark contrast to the kind of teaching Barbara Kimes Myers calls "momma birding," in which teachers spoon-feed knowledge to learners.³⁴

Consider "momma birding" in the context of theological education. Typically, a seminary course syllabus provides learners with assigned readings. The learner does not have to think about the book and how it relates to a topic in the course; the relationship is already defined by the assigned reading from the course text. Compare this with an approach in which there are no assigned readings from the course textbooks. The syllabus provides the learner with the topic for a given session and leaves it to the learner to find the relevant chapters or sections in the course textbooks or other outside resources. This is more like the situation the learner will encounter in ministry.

Challenges

Those who find the emerging concept of teaching churches engaging and stimulating must also come to grips with the considerable challenges that accompany any significant change in the way men and women are equipped for the ministry of Word and sacrament. Resistance to change runs deep, requiring the conversion of both heart and mind. Any change worthwhile implementing demands a realistic understanding of how systems operate, careful attention to criticism, a gentle but firm patience which allows people time to adjust to and accept change, and an educative approach which encourages learning rather than insisting on compliance.

The teaching church approach challenges theological educators to reassess the role of experiential learning in the equipping of men and women for ministry. Some things cannot be taught effectively in classroom settings. As Wise pointed out so long ago, "Theological education needs to accept and act upon the fact that the discussion of relationships in the classroom is no substitute for the actual experience of relationships under supervision."³⁵

A seminarian can read about the grief process in a textbook, and discuss how a funeral service addresses the mourners' needs. But this cognitive knowledge needs to be complemented by the kind of affective and experiential knowledge that comes from being with mourners at a funeral home visitation and from bearing witness to resurrection faith in a funeral sermon. Experiential learning as the practice of ministry which sharpens pastoral care skills is different from experiential learning as a source of pastoral understanding which deepens pastoral wisdom and develops pastoral competence.

The teaching church approach also challenges congregations to reassess their role in theological education. M.Div. candidates need settings in which they can engage in the practice of ministry. The ATS standards for the M.Div. degree program mandate that seminaries make provision for this: "The institution shall have established procedures for selection, development, evaluation, and termination of supervised ministry settings" (A.3.1.4.5).³⁶ These need to be more than program maintenance opportunities in which the seminarian's involvement is limited to leading the senior high youth group or teaching a catechism class. Access to the pulpit and opportunity to provide pastoral care are also important to the formation of ministers. Some congregations are reluctant to open the pulpit to a seminarian because they would rather hear the gospel proclaimed by their pastor. Other congregations find that in a crisis their members want to be cared for by their pastor rather than a seminarian. This means that not every congregation can be a teaching church.

The teaching church approach challenges ministers to equip themselves for the responsibility of supervision. The ATS standards for the M.Div. degree program state: "Qualified persons shall be selected as field supervisors and trained in supervisory methods and the educational expectations of the institution" (A.3.1.4.4).³⁷ While many pastors have wisdom and experience to share with seminarians assigned to them, not all pastors have the necessary supervisory skills to make their time together a valuable contribution to the seminarian's education. Acquiring the requisite supervisory skills requires time and effort. Pastors have difficulty squeezing time out of their busy schedules to be trained for supervision, let alone time for the continuing supervision of a seminarian. Not every pastor has the gift and calling to be a supervisor, and those who are must be willing to undergo ongoing training and supervision themselves.

The ATS standards call for more than supervisory knowledge and skills, however. Supervising pastors must also understand the educational expectations of the seminary. They become partners with the faculty, sharing the institution's values, purposes, and philosophy.

The teaching church concept also challenges denominations, for these bodies establish standards and allocate resources for the training of ministers. Denominations contribute to theological education by calling congregations and pastors to high standards of competence and effectiveness; by interpreting the need for congregational-based learning and encouraging congregations to see themselves as teaching churches, especially through regional and local assemblies which are close to the grass roots of the church; by providing funds so that congregations otherwise lacking resources can engage a seminarian as a student pastor; and by supporting faculty development through grants to seminaries to equip professors to re-shape their approach to teaching and learning.

Conclusion

The emerging paradigm of the teaching church represents a fresh opportunity for denominations, congregations, and seminaries to reflect critically on the strengths and weaknesses of current patterns of theological education. While no one would deny the importance of engaging in ministry for the formation of ministers, some would disagree with aspects of the concept.

One important criticism is raised by theological educators who favor a proposal to reform theological education by a shift from a clerical paradigm focused on the training of individuals for the duties of the pastorate to a congregational paradigm focused on the life and mission of faith communities. Theologian John B. Cobb, Jr., writing from a global mission perspective, fears "that the focus on the congregation can encourage the ingrownness of the church that is already its basic disease."³⁸ Letty M. Russell, writing with a sensitivity to issues of power and control, adds, "Underlying the choice of congregational models are who chooses them and whose questions they will help answer."³⁹ These concerns should be taken seriously by all proponents of the teaching church as a model for ministerial formation.

Consider Russell's concern about the implicit values and tacit assumptions which inform and shape our understanding of what it means to be the church. Already in the January, 1990, issue of *The Parish Papers*, church consultant Lyle Schaller noted a trend in large congregations to train their own staffs rather than to depend on seminary training.⁴⁰ James Sweeney and Stephen Fortosis also mention the *Church-Training Model* for ministers, in which megachurches are the setting for theological education and their staff is the faculty.⁴¹ The inherent danger in this trend is that the large congregation and the megachurch become the dominant model of what congregations should look like. That model always needs to be balanced by a reminder of the strengths and gifts of the small membership church.

Critics also contend that the emerging teaching church model encourages the tendency to value the practical disciplines for ministry more than the academic disciplines. A separation of theory from practice underlies some of the language used to describe this concept. Seminaries are viewed as places where M.Div. candidates receive formal instruction in the classical theological disciplines for ministry, while congregations are seen as places where M.Div. candidates gain practical experience in ministry. The two are viewed as separate, unrelated worlds.

This unfortunate separation of theory from practice has hindered a more holistic approach to the formation of ministers. As Cobb asserts, "we should rid ourselves of every vestige of the theory-practice view of theological education."⁴² There are seminarians who view academic study as irrelevant because they want to get on with ministry, and there are seminarians who enjoy cognitive engagement with abstract ideas because they shrink back from

relational activities and other more practical matters of ministry. Neither extreme produces good ministers. The one devalues scholarship, while the other devalues ministry skills and practices.

An integration which challenges seminary faculty to bring the practice of ministry into focus as they teach, and which challenges pastors to bring theological reflection into focus as they administer, preach, teach, and care for souls would be more helpful. This kind of "constructive relationship" is precisely what the ATS standards for the M.Div. degree program call for:

A.3.1.4.1 The program shall provide for courses in the areas of ministry practice and for educational experiences within supervised ministry settings.

A.3.1.4.2 The program shall ensure a constructive relationship among courses dealing primarily with the practice of ministry and courses dealing primarily with other subjects.⁴³

Theological educators have long recognized the value of field education, but the implementation of an effective teaching church model is a major challenge. Joseph C. Hough, Jr. and John B. Cobb, Jr. describe one of the difficulties this way: "There are a few impressive field education programs, but in the main they are expensive and difficult to sustain. Such programs seem to us to be beyond the capability of most theological schools."⁴⁴ They proposed that churches assume "the major responsibility for education in reflective practice" and that seminary graduates be placed in teaching churches as ordinands for a probationary period.

The RCA recently rejected just such a proposal from its Task Force on Standards for the Preparation for the Professional Ministry in the Reformed Church in America. This denominational act is a reminder that a major challenge for the emerging teaching church model is financial rather than educational or theological.

This paper began by observing the confusion that surrounds the use of the term, "teaching churches." A final ambiguity should be noted in conclusion. This paper was intentionally titled, "Teaching Churches," in order to highlight two important truths. First, churches teach. They are critical resources for the preparation of men and women for ministry of Word and sacrament. Second, the seminarians who are welcomed in teaching churches as learners also *teach* these congregations. To view the relationship as a one-way street in which seminarians learn from their experience in teaching churches is to miss the reality that the churches also learn from the experience. The relationship is mutual because teaching churches at their best are also learning churches.

ENDNOTES

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