Constructing Faithful Action:
Inculcating a Method for Reflective Ministry
Scott Cormode

Theological schools exist to prepare our[1] graduates to exercise the vocations to which God has called them. This may not be our only task but it is our primary one. It is the reason that most students come to our schools; it is the mandate that our mission statements set for us;[2] and it is the responsibility that congregations and denominations trust us to fulfill. Our students' callings may take different forms. Some of the leaders we educate become ordained clergy engaged in parish ministry; others pursue callings as chaplains, counselors and social service providers; and many serve as lay people without ever being formally ordained. And it is true that not all of our graduates anticipate leading - about one in four prepares for a scholarly calling.[3] But the fact remains that most seminary graduates expect to lead the

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[1]   Throughout this essay, I use the first-person plural to talk about theological education. I am trying to signal as I do this that I (as a seminary professor) am not immune from the criticism or the suggestions proffered here. These ideas apply to all of us in theological education.

[2]   I examined the mission statements of the sixty-five largest members of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) and found that almost all of them included a statement about preparing leaders, although it was sometimes balanced against a mandate to prepare scholars as well. In the mission statements of the ATS schools, the terms "prepare," "equip," "form," and "educate" are used interchangeably, as are the terms "ministry," "leadership" and sometimes "service." So one mission statement says, for example, that the school "exists to equip committed Christians for leadership in ministries of..." Another comes from a school "whose mission is to educate and equip individuals for the ordained Christian ministry and other forms of Christian service and leadership." A few schools (perhaps one in ten) used the word "educate" but probably did not mean to attach the connotations of skills development that most schools included in the words "prepare" and "equip." For example, Harvard Divinity School states that its "purpose is to educate women and men for service as leaders in religious life and thought."

[3]   There are three times as many (full-time equivalent) theological students in "ministerial leadership" programs (e.g. M.Div., D.Min., M.A. in Religious Education) as there are in programs geared toward an "academic" career (e.g. Ph.D., M.A.R., Th.M.). Daniel Aleshire and Jonathan Strom, eds., *Fact Book on Theological Education*, 1995-1996 (Pittsburgh: Association of Theological Schools, 1996) Table 2.11, 36.

mission efforts of God's people. Theological schools must, therefore, nurture religious leaders.[4] The question becomes, how are we to do this and what standards should we use to gauge our efforts?

There are many ways to evaluate theological education's effect on religious leadership. We could discuss the personal traits of a good leader, or the skills and gifts that leaders need, perhaps distinguishing between various leadership styles.[5] We could proceed inductively from a host of examples,[6] contrasting perhaps the charisma of John Wesley with the organizational genius of Francis Asbury. We could focus on a particular life, examining the strengths and weaknesses of someone like Martin Luther King. Or, we could exegete a single moment in time, the moment when a leader must

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[4]   This is a surprisingly controversial conclusion, as we shall see. A number of scholars who write about theological education, most notably David Kelsey, argue that schools cannot take on this responsibility to form leaders. He believes, first, that any emphasis on leaders will by nature succumb to Farley's "clerical paradigm" (which will be explained below) and, second, that "we cannot achieve the education of superlative leaders by a course of study defined the roles and tasks of church leadership" (1993:223). He thus believes that superlative leaders emerge as the by-product of other formative processes rather than as the direct result of intentional effort. He argues, instead, that a theological school should have "one overarching goal: more clearly to understand God and to understand everything in relation to God" (1997:131). I believe that we can accomplish that goal and still fail to prepare the future leaders entrusted to our care. Understanding everything in relationship to God is only the first step; leaders must also know how to act in accord with that understanding. They must know how to translate faithfulness into faithful action. Only then will they be ready to serve communities of faith. Thus, while I concur that training in the "roles and tasks" of leadership is an inadequate proxy for forming leaders, I believe that it is naïve to believe that we can fulfill our responsibility if we only approach it tangentially. We must prepare leaders without adopting the "professional school model." It is our mandate and we cannot shrink from it. David Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993); David Kelsey, "What's theological about a theological school?," *Christian Century* 114, no. 5 (February 5-12, 1997): 131-132.

[5]   There is a voluminous literature on leadership styles. They range from scholarly texts such as Jay Conger and Rabindra Kanungo, *Charismatic Leadership in Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998) to popular texts published by presses like the Alban Institute. Of particular interest to religious leaders is the work of David Nygren. See David Nygren, et. al., "Outstanding Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations: Leadership Competencies in Roman Catholic Religious Orders," *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* 4:4 (Summer 1994): 375-391; David Nygren and Miriam Ukeritis, *The Future of Religious Orders in the United States: Transformation and Commitment* (New York: Praeger, 1993).

[6]   Howard Gardner, *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

decide what to do next, the moment when the comforting range of options must narrow to just one next step.

It is in that isolated moment - repeated each ministering day - that the disparate seminary courses must come together and inform the leader our schools have prepared. The theological facility and the pastoral sensitivity, the ethical judgment and historical perspective are each supposed to lend their counsel as the prepared leader makes a crucial decision. I believe that that one moment, *the moment when leadership matters,* measures the effectiveness of theological education as leadership education. Let me illustrate what I mean.

It is Tuesday afternoon and the Reverend Clare Morgan is sitting in her office at Grace Church drowsily sifting through her mail. She has just returned from a lunch appointment and expects to spend a couple of hours in the office before attending the Board of Elders meeting in the evening.

The top sheet on the stack of papers pleases Clare even before she picks it up. It is the first report of the new Sunday School Director, Angela Michaels. Angela symbolizes for Rev. Morgan the new hope that has blossomed since Clare became pastor of the 200-member mainline congregation three years ago. Angela is young and energetic, full of ideas - a former bank branch manager with an infant daughter. Angela is one of a handful of Grace Church's newer members who have taken responsibility for the long-neglected Sunday School program. Clare smiled as she thought of Angela proudly presenting her report to the Board. It was a very hopeful time at Grace Church.

But as Clare read Angela's report, she began to worry. There was trouble on the horizon. Angela was headed for a tongue-lashing from the church treasurer. Angela's sin appeared innocent enough. She and the Christian Education Committee had decided to abandon the Sunday School curriculum produced by the denominational publishing house. They had met together as a committee, reviewed the available options and, in accordance with the church rules, selected the curriculum.

Angela's report said that they chose the one that was "the most Christ-centered." The fact that it was not published by the denomination was never really a factor in their decision.

Clare knew this was going to be a problem. She knew it was going to upset Gilbert Gaddis, the church treasurer. Gil had an authoritarian personality. He tended to reprimand people who disagreed with him. He had been the treasurer for twenty years and Clare had not yet convinced him that his job as treasurer did not include veto power. Indeed, he believed that he had earned the right to approve all congregational purchases. The fact that Angela had not consulted with Gil was going to make him testy. But that was not the real problem. Gil was one of the core group in the congregation who felt a real allegiance to the denomination. This band of denominational stalwarts tended to be more theologically liberal than the young families who were beginning to take responsibility for the Sunday School. The old guard, as Clare thought of them, would likely be disturbed by the theological content of the new curriculum. They would interpret it as yet another sign that they were losing control of the congregation that they had sustained for a generation. Clare was convinced that Gil would view Angela's report as saying that she had turned her back on the denomination, and done it without his approval.

Instantly, Clare knew this was a pivotal moment in her ministry at Grace Church. This situation touched on too many of the issues bubbling below the surface of her growing congregation. Now was the time for Clare to exercise leadership. Clare ditched her plans for the afternoon and decided instead to map out a strategy for meeting the evening's challenge.

The moment Clare began to sense trouble on the horizon, that is the moment when we in theological education earn our living.[7] It was her seminary experience that prepared her to

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7   Note that the situation applies as readily to non-ordained religious leaders working outside a congregation as it does to ordained clergy working within a parish. The leader must decide how to act in a difficult situation and to do so in accord with the faith she represents.

interpret the multi-faceted needs of the situation, even as it enabled her to design and implement a plan of action. It is important for us to examine how her theological education participated in that moment when leadership mattered. But first we must ask what a theological education *should* do to prepare a leader to exercise her calling.

Many thoughtful observers are worried about the state of theological education. One professor laments, for example, that "there is a profound problem with how theology is typically taught." And another pair complain, "Something is wrong in mainline theological institutions. We can feel it, we can hear it, we can see it."[8] A decade or two of thinking by some of our sharpest minds has yielded surprisingly ambiguous conclusions. David Kelsey's summary of the theological education debate, for example, can provide in the end only a sage-like moral, one that all but precludes a vision for theological education. "Focus on the end of theological education," he counsels, "not on its methods and structure; conceptualize theological education teleologically and not functionally or formally."[9] We know more about what theological education is not than we do about what it is. And there is a temptation after all this hand wringing to believe that nothing much can be done, to wonder aloud if we already have the best system we are going to be able to create. But that nagging sensation will not go away. When the next class of black-robed graduates marches across the stage, many professors will wonder from the front rows, "Are they prepared?"[10]

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8   Thomas Groome, "Theology on Our Feet: A Revisionist Pedagogy for Healing the Gap between Academia and Ecclesia," in *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge and James N. Poling (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) 55; Ronald Cram & Stanley Saunders, "Feet Partly of Iron and Partly of Clay: Pedagogy and the Curriculum of Theological Education," *Theological Education* 28, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 21.

9   Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin,* 222.

10 There is also a strain of thought that says that no one can be prepared for ministry until they have been in ministry. This group emphasizes the kind of training that congregations do to prepare their own people through apprentice-like programs. Such a consideration deserves its own essay. Instead, I will simply make two comments. To those who advocate such apprenticeship programs, I would argue that the leaders who come from such programs end up being qualitatively different from seminary graduates in one crucial way. The apprenticed graduates are better at replicating theologically-reflective ministry than they are in initiating it. Using the terms we will develop later in the essay, they have a harder time constructing faithful action than they do replicating it. To

Kelsey's seminal summary avers that no matter how much
the question nags at us, it is the wrong question. "Focus on
clarifying the end of theological education," he warns, "but do
not define that end as the training of clergy." This is a false
goal, he argues, and not just because theological education
must address far more walks of life than the "peculiar calling
of the clergy." He falls back on intuition to explain what he
means. "Experience has shown that theological education
defined as clergy education suffers from the 'happiness
paradox'," he said, "that is, just as one cannot achieve
happiness by a course of life defined by the pursuit of
happiness, so we cannot achieve the education of superlative
church leaders by a course of study defined by the roles and
tasks of church leadership."[11] Kelsey offers instead a model
for theological education whose telos is "to understand God
truly." For this, he believes, is "what makes theological
education theological."[12] I will argue that Kelsey's emphasis
on "understanding God" is inadequate to the task of preparing
religious leaders to exercise their vocations.

My vision builds on the foundation laid by the recent self-
critical discussions in theological education; for they address
not just the nature of theological education, but the nature of
ministry itself.[13] At the core of these discussions has been a

those within theological education, I would say that we have a lot to learn
from these locally-centered apprenticeship programs. Their graduates are often
more effective in ministry (see definition of faithful action below). At some
point, we in theological education should examine Clayton Christiansen's work
on "disruptive technologies," which describe what happens when established
industries are blind-sided by new ways of accomplishing means that the indus-
try takes for granted. For example, vinyl-record manufacturers were so busy
competing with each other that they did not see the compact-disc revolution
that would render their product obsolete. By the same token, we theological
educators should not ignore these congregationally-based apprenticeship pro-
grams. On this alternate method of theological education, see Donald E. Miller,
Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium
(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); On disruptive technology, see
Clayton Christiansen, The Innovator's Dilemma (Boston: Harvard Business
School Press, 1997).

11 *Ibid.*, 223.
12 David Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological About a Theological
School?* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992); Kelsey, "What's theo-
logical about a theological school?"; the original construction "that which makes
a theological school theological" comes from Edward Farley, *Theologia: The
Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,
1983), 146.
13 N.B. I use the term "ministry" here in a broad sense to connote the religious
work of lay people as well as clergy. The defining characteristics of "ministry"

critique of something called "the clerical paradigm," a malady first diagnosed by Edward Farley.[14]   The clerical paradigm represents the temptation to structure theological education around the tasks a minister performs. It asserts that the way to make a good minister is to teach her how to do the things ministers do.   Behind the paradigm is the tacit belief that a pastor who fulfills the preaching, teaching, counseling and administrative duties in her job description has captured the essence of ministry.   There is, however, a nasty flaw in the clerical paradigm.   A helpful analogy in understanding the fallacy at the heart of the clerical paradigm is the life of a stay-at-home parent.[15]   A parent may spend her or his days cooking meals, picking up clothes and shopping for groceries, but those duties are not the essence of parenthood. The task is much deeper.   Behind all the duties is the more fundamental responsibility of forming character, of inculcating values, of modeling behavior. These deeper responsibilities are the ones that make the long hours and constant activity worth doing.   By the same token, the heart of a pastor's vocation is to inspire and commend, to deepen the spiritual lives of a congregation - being able to preach well just is not enough. Neither is it enough for a seminary to focus only on the duties a minister performs. The goal is not to form leaders who do the things ministers do. It is to form leaders who help people experience the fullness of God's love.   The clerical paradigm thus misrepresents a pastor's calling because ministry cannot be summed up in the daily-duties of a minister any more than parenting can be reduced to washing clothes and wiping noses. Theological education must aspire to more than simply preparing leaders for the <u>tasks</u> of ministry.

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in this sense revolve around service in the name of the divine.

[14] Farley, *Theologia;* A testament to the importance of the "clerical paradigm" as a foil for understanding theological education is Joseph C. Hough and Barbara G. Wheeler, eds., *Beyond Clericalism: The Congregation as a Focus for Theological Education* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

[15] I should acknowledge that for some people the childhood experiences of home life make it impossible for them to see any comparison between parenting and pastoring as helpful. They remember the time as fraught with potentials for violence or understand the parental role as too paternalistic to apply to ministry.

FAITHFUL ACTION

I believe that the goal of Christian ministry is what I will call "faithful action," and that (by extension) the goal of theological education is to teach our graduates to construct faithful action. There are four components to faithful action, as the first half of this essay will explain. It is, primarily, *faithful*. That is, faithful action must conform to the purposes of God. This is important because it must also be *effective* in that it accomplishes what the action intends. These two characteristics - faithful and effective - exist in a balance. Some pastors work hard to find a faithful goal, but then execute their actions so poorly that they miss their painfully construed mark. Others accomplish exactly what they set out to do, but pursue their own goals rather than the ones revealed from God. The two must exist in balance. Faithful action is *contextual* as well. What one pastor should do in her context may be quite different from what another minister should do when faced with a similar situation in his context. And, finally, faithful action is *communal*. It takes into account the needs of the whole people of God. Faithful action is the goal of ministry.

The second half of the essay will focus on the process that a person imbibes in order to construct faithful action. It is a circular process in that it has neither beginning nor end. We keep going around the circle as we engage our world. The process has four nodes: description, reflection, construction, and strategy. I also believe that a pastor who is working to construct faithful action needs to go around the cycle at least twice before taking a step because we often learn things in the strategy phase that require reflection before we can act. The purpose of this cyclical process of reflection is to enable the reflective leader to take the next faithful step. Taking one step often requires a leader to plan out a number of steps. But, I would argue, after each step the leader needs to pause to reflect on those plans because she often learns something in taking that step that enables a new perspective, a perspective that may well require the leader to re-construct her plans. Thus, the reflective process I will describe for constructing faithful action becomes like the process an experienced driver follows when driving a car down a busy street. The driver is constantly taking in information and

instinctively assigning a meaning to that information. The driver knows which parts of his environment require simple monitoring (e.g. the Volvo in the next lane) and which ones demand special focus (e.g. the bicyclist who is moving erratically or the distracted mother entering traffic). The driver's reflective process is almost instinctive in that years of driving have cultivated instincts that tell the driver how to react. Likewise, seminary education inculcates in our graduates a reflective process built around these four nodes. Eventually pastors learn to proceed through these four nodes without having to process the thought consciously. In this way, theological education forms in them the habits of reflection to construct faithful action.

1. EFFECTIVE

In order to explain the four components of faithful action, I will describe the historical influences that have shaped the structure of theological education as we know it. In the debate over how to form pastors for ministry, some of the church's most sophisticated theologians have debated the very purposes of ministry. By looking at what the church has tried to teach its ministers, we encounter competing models for ministry itself.

There are two great traditions in theological education, each of which holds a different understanding of how religious leaders are prepared. I will eventually argue that we have to take the best from each tradition rather than privileging one over the other. One model is the professional school model - represented by Schleiermacher's university program in Berlin. The professional school model is highly structured. It emphasizes the logical movement from theory to practice. So, for example, if someone wanted to learn about preaching, she would read communication theory and learn about the degrees of rhetorical expression. And then she would apply this theory in her local circumstance. The goal of the professional school model of theological education is effectiveness - being able to do one's job well. A well-schooled pastor would thus be an effective counselor (applying the most appropriate theories to the appropriate situation). She would be an effective preacher, a dynamic teacher, a clear and technically-sophisticated exegete.

Whatever ministry situation she encountered, she would excel. This is the strand of theological education that asserts that faithful action must be effective. It says that a pastor must be able to accomplish the goals that she sets for herself.

No one can be opposed to effectiveness in that we all want our graduates to be able to excel.[16] But there would be a problem with the professional model if it were the only standard for theological education. The problem, of course, is that this professional model lacks a soul. Being a good preacher does not do much good if one is preaching on the wrong thing. And it does not take into account the unique constraints of specifically-religious leadership. There are certain strategies that a religious leader cannot follow, no matter how effective they might be. Not just character assassination and political intrigue - although we can safely assume they are also off-limits to religious leaders - but other organizational strategies are off-limits as well. Let me illustrate what I mean with an example of two students who came to theological education with tremendous experience as effective leaders. They initially thought that leading God's people would be no different than leading any other organization - all it requires, they believed, was an effective leader. They learned, however, that faithful action cannot have effectiveness as its only standard.

The students were part of an Administration class for the United Methodist Course of Study program, which provides an alternate track to ordination. There were twelve people in the class, but the two I have in mind were each former vice-presidents of Fortune 500 companies. They assumed that the class offered little for them because they already knew how to be effective managers. But one case study we examined in the class illustrated to them why their professional training was inadequate. It showed them that religious leadership requires something more than effectiveness. One of their classmates told of a situation in her church. She said that the man who had been treasurer for decades was getting old and was no longer able to carry out his duties. He kept forgetting to pay bills and balance the books. And, although he knew it

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[16] This model of education is supported, for example, by the many and varied passages of Scripture that emphasize "bearing fruit" and by the emphasis of the Pastoral Epistles on how to practice effective ministry (as we will see, those same Pastoral Epistles also emphasize the character formation of a leader).

was a problem, he could not give the position. He wanted to continue contributing to the church. We agreed as a class that in the typical Fortune 500 company, the solution to this problem is easy. Give the treasurer his gold watch, thank him for his years of faithful service, and get rid of him. That would be the strategy if effectiveness were our only standard. But, we further agreed, that was not an option in the church. It would be inappropriate to preach on Sunday that all people hold dignity before God, and then cast someone aside on Tuesday night. So the congregation in this case came up with a brilliant plan. They found a way for him to "tutor" a new treasurer, a young man who would eventually take his place. They found a way for him to make a contribution and still get the electric bill paid. Effectiveness was simply not the most important criteria in meeting the needs of this situation.[17] A professional school model of theological education that emphasized only effectiveness would have failed to prepare a religious leader in this case.

2. FAITHFUL

That is where the other model of theological education comes in. Its goal is character formation. It proceeds on the assumption that if seminary education molds students' views of the world, then they will have the tools to be religious leaders. It argues, in short, that who a minister is is more important than what she does.

Building on a classically-Greek model of education - in contrast to Schleiermacher's German model - its goal is faithfulness and wisdom. Edward Farley is the most sophisticated contemporary advocate for this model. In his seminal book, Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education, he argued that theologia represented a kind of "reflective wisdom" or "theological understanding" that had become so internalized that it became a habitus, or habit of life. This theologia, he said, "is the presupposed subject matter and goal of all education in the ecclesial

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[17]   This particular class and its effect on one business-leader-turned-seminarian is described in Melinda Heppe, "Life and Faith 101: Teaching Students To Take Stewardship into the World," In Trust (Autumn 1997): 8-11.

community."[18] The implication is that the goal of theological education is cognitive and dispositional. It is to create the disposition to act based on rigorously reflective wisdom. Or, in Farley's language, the telos of theological education is to cultivate the habitus of theologia.[19] Kelsey extends and systematizes Farley's emphasis on knowing when he writes that the only pure purpose for theological education is "to understand God truly."[20] He believes that the pastor who understands God truly will always carry the right motivations and embody the most noble and holy values.

Just as no one can be opposed to effectiveness, no one will argue that it is bad to understand God truly, nor will anyone say that *theologia's* reflective wisdom is not a crucial habit of life for any Christian - especially one who entrusted to lead God's people. I believe, however, that understanding God is an inadequate standard for ministry and for theological education. Wisdom is a necessary but not a sufficient goal. It is part of our purpose, but not the sum total of it. Our graduates must understand God truly <u>and also</u> be able to act in ways consistent with that understanding. They must be able to conceive of faithful goals <u>and also</u> bring those goals to fruition. Understanding is an insufficient goal for the same reason that theory cannot be separated from practice. Understanding does not imply acting, nor is understanding complete without action. "It is more important for us to *do* what is true than to *know* it," one prominent educator has written. For "Biblical truth, indeed much truth we encounter in the world, must be done in order to [be] fully understood."[21]   It does not honor God nor does it serve Christ's church for our graduates to practice poorly what they preach well. I am arguing that we must give our actions as much deep thought as our beliefs. Here is the problem I have in mind: far too often our graduates use their education to

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[18] Edward Farley, *The Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church and the University* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 90; Farley, *Theologia,* 176.

[19] A particularly helpful summary of Farley's dense argument is David Kelsey and Barbara Wheeler, "New Ground: The Foundations and Future of the Theological Education Debate," in *Theology and the Interhuman: Essays in Honor of Edward Farley,* ed. Robert R. Williams (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), esp. 186, 187.

[20] Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly.*

[21] William A. Dyrness, *The Earth is God's: A Theology of American Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 21.

establish true and noble goals but then adopt simplistic and unreflective means of achieving those goals. Reflective wisdom can help them evaluate their circumstances but will not help them construct new strategies for action.

It is likely that Farley believes that his notion of reflective wisdom (theologia) implies some kind of action.[22] He does not develop the idea, but does provide a pair of footnotes that move in the direction of this undeveloped theme. First, he summarizes Paulo Freire. "Without action, education is...mere verbalism; without reflection, it is mere activism." And, in the next footnote, Farley quotes Alfred Whitehead's definition of education as the "acquisition of the art of the ulitisation of knowledge." These quotations are puzzling in that Freire's action-reflection model specifically castigates thinking apart from doing even as Whitehead emphasizes the use of knowledge over against its mere acquisition. Freire and Whitehead each call for thinking about action to be as rigorous as thinking about knowledge is. Farley's notion of *theologia* as a <u>disposition</u> to act and Kelsey's emphasis on understanding each seem to fail this test.[23] Some may say that a true understanding of God will include practice (or praxis) and therefore be sufficient for preparing a religious leader. But even if we posit an utterly true understanding of God (an unreachable goal), then the best we have are leaders who can invent actions that are consistent with their true understanding. This means that the best we can hope for is that our leaders will be equipped to re-invent the wheel each

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[22]   There are some who have read Farley and Kelsey in this way. For example, Robert Johnston seems to imply that true understanding includes true praxis. Robert Johnston, "Becoming Theologically Mature: The Task of Theological Education Today," unpublished paper presented to the Lilly Conference on the Aims and Purposes of Evangelical Theological Higher Education, San Juan Capistrano, CA, July 1997.

[23]   Farley, *Fragility of Knowledge,* 100, notes 3 and 4, referencing Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), 75-76 and A.N. Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1929), 4. In another essay, Farley distinguishes habitus (meaning "an existential personal act and relation of the human self - namely, wisdom) from *scientia* (meaning a science or an abstract "discipline of inquiry"). He concludes the section with the statement, "Obviously, theology/*habitus* has a different relation to praxis than theology/faculty and theology/science." What that relation to praxis is and how it changes the very meaning of *habitus*, he does not say. Edward Farley, "Theology and Practice Outside the Clerical Paradigm," in *Practical Theology,* ed. Don S. Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 23, 24.

day. Such does not, I believe, adequately prepare leaders to exercise their callings. Theological schools must model ways of translating faithful motivations into faithful actions.

There is an important reason to emphasize that right thinking and right motivation do not necessarily lead to right action. The educational model present in our schools today emphasizes talking over doing. This problem exists in many professional schools, and not just in seminaries. It has come to be called the "smart-talk trap."[24] It refers to the tendency for schools to reward people for sounding smart. The trap rewards students who unnecessarily complicate things and who belittle classmates in the name of correcting them. But, more importantly, it allows students to believe that they have been prepared to act when they can describe the goal they have in mind. They do not necessarily have to know how one might make that goal a reality. They just have to describe it. The Athens model of education that emphasizes faithfulness apart from effectiveness is easily tempted by this "smart talk trap" because it does not help students practice translating smart talk into wise action. Let me illustrate the importance and difficulty of this translation.

A few years ago, a journalist named Gary Dorsey caused something of a stir when he published a book called, *Congregation: The Journey Back to Church.*[25]   It is the autobiographical story of a reporter who decided to spend a year in a mainline Protestant church to see what he could see. The book caused a stir because he found it was more interesting to talk about what went on in the church office on Tuesdays than it was to describe what came from the pulpit on Sundays.

Dorsey focused our attention on one Tuesday meeting in particular in order to demonstrate the complex leadership burdens that a religious leader bears. The pastor, Rev. "Van" Parker, had hoped to focus the meeting on a newly-launched capital-fund drive. In the course of the meeting, however, the associate pastor reminded Van that the adult Sunday School class was about to take up a simmering, controversial issue. That set the pastor off. Van was afraid that chaos would

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[24] Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton, "The Smart-Talk Trap," *Harvard Business Review* 77, no. 3 (May 1999): 135-142.

[25] Gary Dorsey, *Congregation: The Journey Back to Church* (New York: Viking, 1995).

abound no matter how the issue was resolved. So, Dorsey reports, the pastor interrupted the staff meeting, set his pledge cards down on a side table and launched into an impromptu sermon. His goal was not to educate or inspire. He simply wanted to stall the issue, to obfuscate and de-rail the debate. He later explained his reasoning to Dorsey. The pastor believed that controversies should only be resolved by consensus and he felt that the congregation was not ready to take up this particular issue. Dorsey described it this way; Van "had not meant to be coy at the staff meeting, but he felt he had no choice. Integration, not alienation; consolidation, not confrontation, [the pastor explained,] those were the hallmarks of pastoral leadership." Parker clearly had cultivated a noble disposition to act by privileging community and consensus.

There was, however, a deep contradiction in Rev. Parker's actions. Parker steam-rolled everyone in the room, all in the name of harmony. He filibustered to promote dialogue. In short, he preached community and then denied it in his actions. Although Dorsey portrays Parker as a sympathetic figure trapped by circumstances, his *pathos* could be the epitaph for Parker's credibility. "Van's promise of new life after Easter," Dorsey lamented, had been "forgotten in protracted shove-and-duck rounds of church politics."[26] In the end, Van did not accomplish what he set out to do. He was ineffective as a leader because he could not come up with a plan of action that was consistent with his beliefs. In short, his behavior did not measure up to his own "hallmarks of pastoral leadership." His understanding of God may have been true, but his action did not embody his reflection.

This leads right back to the "happiness paradox," which was introduced as an analogy for understanding why any attempt to make preparing leaders the ultimate goal of theological education is folly. Perhaps a different analogy is in order. We have all met new parents who vow that they will not make the same mistakes their own parents made. They will not raise their voices or indulge their children or succumb to whatever excess they saw in their own upbringing. And many of us greet those idealistic pronouncements with a wry smile. For it is a difficult thing to escape one's initial

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[26] Dorsey, *Congregation*, 84-87.

formation. These new parents lack models for imagining different behavior. They may not want to replicate their parents' behavior but they often do not have any other behavior to offer in its place. When angry, they do not know what to do besides shout. So, in the end, they fall into old patterns and replicate their parents' now discredited ways. When we seek to change only the minds of our students (without giving them opportunities to invent and practice new patterns of action), we cast them as those idealistic young parents. They can critique the methods that formed them. But, in the end, they end up replicating those mistakes in their ministering contexts because they have no other models for action. They have not been taught how to put their new thinking into action and eventually they revert to old habits. We have to spend as much time helping our students reflectively construct faithful action as we spend helping them critique the actions that people have taken in the past.[27]

One final example may make this crucial point more clear. Joe is a mainline pastor in the Northeast. Serious theological reflection taught him that the hierarchical leadership of his forebears is inconsistent with a gospel of grace and love. The cognitive quality of his arguments about the old modes of leading is impeccable and his motivation is good. The problem is with the new models that he has constructed to put in their place. In his determination to empower the laity,

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[27] Ironies abound in this discovery. First, an emphasis on *theologia* as *habitus* or on understanding God truly has the ironic consequence of making *theologia* and understanding the theory that must eventually be put into practice. It makes practice little more than an implementation detail. Let me illustrate what I mean with another irony. The very debate on the aims and purposes of theological education shows the inadequacy of emphasizing dispositions to change that do not have well-formed implications for action. The two people who understand the literature best summarize it this way. "Most of the new proposals [regarding theological education] have not included specific suggestions...Their goal has been to change the conceptual environment" - that is, to create new understanding and new dispositions to act. "This effort has not, so far, been a success," according to the wisest observers, in that most faculty-level discussions of theological education revert to discredited dualisms such as church/academy and knowledge/skills (Kelsey and Wheeler, "New Ground," 189). Note the irony built into this admission. Two decades of rigorous reflection may have changed people's thinking or even their disposition to act but it did not enable them to take faithful action because it did not provide new models to replace the old thinking. There needs to be a new language for constructing standards of action. Diagnosing problems such as the clerical paradigm is not enough. This is, ironically, the new parents' problem played out within our midst.

he describes his leadership style as an "adhocracy." What he means is that he will initiate no programs. Instead, he will devote himself, on an ad hoc basis, to supporting whatever programs and activities bubble up from the laity. He spent many long hours reflecting on his leadership style and concluded that this model adheres most closely to his understanding of God and his commitment to the priesthood of all believers. Unfortunately, the theory fails in practice (as often happens when theory and practice are separated). The very laity that Joe hopes to serve do not feel empowered; they experience his leadership as passive and capricious. When they come looking for guidance on a new project or help with a new idea, he offers little more than a pat on the back. He does not want to be too directive lest he lord it over them. But he goes too far in the opposite direction. The laity feel abandoned to their own devices. The typical pattern in the parish, then, is for many projects to begin, but few are sustained. They simply cannot endure without the requisite pastoral support. Joe wanted to empower lay people for all the right reasons, but he ended up weighing them down. Joe's theological education helped him critique the behavior of his forebears and implanted within him a disposition to act faithfully (i.e. without lording it over laity), but in the end it failed him (and the laity) because it did not help him construct faithful action that lived up to his reflection. Neither faithfulness nor effectiveness can stand alone as a standard for religious leadership. Each is a component of "faithful action."

3. CONTEXTUAL

Faithful action, to summarize, encompasses action that is faithful, effective, contextual, communal. What is meant by faithful and effective should be clear by now. But more needs to be said about the meaning of the term "contextual" and about the ways that these characteristics fit together into a theory of action.

"Faithful action" involves a cycle of thinking theologically and acting in the world, what Browning (by way of Gadamer) calls a practice-theory-practice model of theological inquiry.[28]

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[28] "Gadamer's hermeneutic theory clearly breaks down the theory-to-practice (text-to-application) model of humanistic learning... It implies more nearly a radical practice-theory-practice model of understanding." Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*

As Thomas Groome has observed, the goal is not to "know about theology" or to do "theology in the library" where it can be "done either for the people or to the people," but to "do theology in a societal context."[29] He wants to allow the specific circumstances to shape the theologizing even as the theology interprets the meaning of the circumstances.

Theologizing outside a specific context is like speaking a language without accent or idiom. Without the connotations or implications, it comprehends less than it claims to understand.   It is the world as seen through translation - almost but not quite the world we live in. By contrast, when we theologize in the midst of specific circumstances, the topic of our discussion may be daily life, but the syntax, vocabulary, form and structure (i.e. the language) comes from Scripture and the history of Christian experience. Our dependence on the language is so profound that speaking it shapes the very ideas that we can perceive.   But the specifics of present circumstances as we speak attach connotations to the words that mold their meaning. Our very use of this language called theology adapts it, even as the language makes meaning out of our experience.

A number of theologians have recently emphasized the necessity for theologizing to be contextual. Yes, but the more basic point is that theology is always contextual, whether we are explicit about it or not. Influenced by the Latin American liberationists, Robert Schreiter defined for American theologians the radically contextual task of "constructing local theologies."[30] The stuff of lived life,[31] especially communal life, was for Schreiter the only legitimate starting point for theology. Only when anchored in communal culture and the life of faith could theologians appropriate, learn from, understand, and follow the wisdom of the ages contained in

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(Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996 [Augsburg Fortress, 1991]), 39.

[29] Groome, "Theology on our Feet," 56.

[30] Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).

[31] A number of scholars have begun to investigate the deeper sociological and spiritual meanings of "lived religion." David Hall has gathered some of their essays into a book. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); see especially Chapter Nine, Nancy Ammerman's "Golden Rule Christianity: Lived Religion in the American Mainstream," 196-217; cf. Penny Edgell Becker and Nancy L. Eiesland, Contemporary American Religion: An Ethnographic Reader (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 1997) and the host of empirical studies that Robert Wuthnow has published in the 1990s.

Scripture and Christian theology. Among those who have extended Schreiter's seminal work are James Nieman, Lenora Tubbs Tisdale and William Dyrness. Nieman has begun to define a theological method by which one might discern the local theolog(ies) already operating within a given congregation. This descriptive process allows the local theologian to determine the best theological path down which to lead her people. Tubbs showed how the preaching art requires a minister to construct a local theology by piecing together local circumstances and ways of thinking with the doctrines and stories of the historic Christian church. Dyrness then created a "vernacular theology" that allows people to express their faith in the idiom of the community. Each of these scholars reveals the interpretive power of theologizing that is neither abstracted from local communities nor captured by it.[32] Faithful Action must be contextual as well as faithful and effective.[33]

4. COMMUNAL

A final component of faithful action applies especially to those who would lead God's people. Faithful action is communal in that it takes into account the needs of the whole people of God. It is relatively easy for a person to figure out what to do when all they have to do is look to their own needs. But a religious leader bears a responsibility for each person entrusted to his or her care. That means that sometimes the most faithful thing to do from a communal perspective is not nearly the most advantageous thing to do from the leader's personal perspective. This is, of course, obvious to any person who knows the deep sacrifices that

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[32] James Robert Nieman, "Local Theologies in American Protestantism: Proposals Toward a Method for Research," unpublished doctoral dissertation, Emory University, 1997; Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) and "Preaching as Local Theology," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* XVII:2 (1996): 132-141; William A. Dyrness, "Vernacular Theology," in *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America,* ed. George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 260-269.

[33] The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) recognized the importance of this contextual component of theological education when it created standards for "globalization." The ATS argues that schools must provide tools for graduates to understand a range of contexts. It is no longer legitimate to focus simply on the middle-class, Anglo context. Students need to learn to work in multiple contexts. On globalization and seminary education, see for example the special issue of the journal *Theological Education* 35:2 (Winter 1999).

pastors routinely make by putting the needs of their congregations ahead of themselves.

There is, however, a much deeper implication to the idea that faithful action is communal. In order to look to the needs of everyone, a religious leader has to know what those needs are. This requires what we might call "systematic listening." A pastor needs to have in place feedback systems that help him or her hear the things that they would not otherwise hear. I have in mind here more than simply ways to find out if your preaching is boring, although that may be important too. I have in mind something that extends into people's daily lives. For example, what are congregants' everyday work experiences? A pastor needs to know what it is like to be a plumber, receptionist, dental hygienist, or engineer in her town. By the same token, what do families experience in the same community? What keeps people awake at night with worry? What things are most precious to them? Any understanding of faithful action must take into account the needs of the whole people of God.

Thus faithful action must be faithful in that it pursues the divine ends. It must be effective in that it accomplishes the ends it sets for itself. It must be contextual in that the meaning of faithfulness and effectiveness change as the context of ministry changes. And it must be communal in that it must pursue goals that address the purposes of all of God's people. The goal of ministry is to construct faithful action.

THE PROCESS FOR CONSTRUCTING FAITHFUL ACTION

It would be tempting at this point in the essay to summarize and move on. But that would be a mistake. For it is not enough to say simply that the goal of theological education is to construct faithful action and then list its four characteristics, namely that it is faithful, effective, contextual, and communal. It would be too easy for the reader or a student to treat these characteristics as tasks on a checklist. Such a mentality leads right back to the clerical paradigm. It assumes that anyone who has completed the checklist must be prepared to minister faithfully.

Instead, I will describe a theologizing process that can lead one toward faithful action (without making any reductionistic guarantees that equate the process with acting

faithfully). The process will provide a way that theological education (and its various disciplines) can find unity and coherence. The process can be seen at a number of levels, each of which carries us toward our goal of preparing leaders to exercise their callings. The process can be understood at the individual level as a means of bringing the fullness of one's experience and learning on a specific situation. And it can be seen on the curricular level as a perspective on how the entire curriculum of theological education participates in that moment when leadership matters.

In discerning this process, I draw on four scholars who have come to similar conclusions by very different paths. There are plenty of other scholars[34] whose work[35] also fits into this general model. But I picked these four because they come from such diverse scholarly perspectives that one would not expect them to agree on much of anything. But they arrive at very compatible conclusions.[36] Don S. Browning built on the "practical philosophy" of Gadamer and Heidegger

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[34] Further religious examples include James and Evelyn Whitehead, who develop a "method of theological reflection in ministry" that draws on Roman Catholic sources. See Whitehead & Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995). One could make similar arguments about two other books that are often used to teach theological reflection. Howard Stone, & James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) and Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983).

[35] From a more secular point of view - one that emphasizes organizations and leadership - David Garvin uses Peter Senge's work on "learning organizations" to develop a model for how organizations can learn. Garvin, *Learning in Action: A Guide to Putting the Learning Organization to Work* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2000). Garvin's model conflates the middle two steps of our model, subsuming what we call reflection and construction under the heading of interpreting. It is clear, however, from his text that interpreting involves both reflective thinking about different interpretations for the data and the construction of a synthetic interpretation that will eventually guide practice; see, esp. pp. 19-43; on the idea of learning organizations, see Peter Senge, "The Leader's New Work: Building Learning Organizations," *Sloan Management Review* 32, no. 1 (Fall 1990): 7-23; The idea of organizational learning was not new when Senge wrote his seminal essay (and the accompanying book *The Fifth Discipline* (New York: Doubleday, 1990). Of particular importance are John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Collier, 1938) and Chris Argyris, and Donald Schön, *Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978).

[36] NB: In some cases (e.g. Browning) the authors describe their model in linear language. We have, however, presented them in cyclic form to emphasize their similarities. This is not, we believe, inconsistent with the intent of the authors, each of whom believes that this reflective process should be continuous and on-going.

to create a four-part "fundamental practical theology."[37] Thomas Groome derived from liberationists such as Paulo Freire and the "genetic epistemologist"[38] Jean Piaget a "shared Christian praxis approach" that extends "critical reflection...toward the end of lived Christian faith."[39] Jack Mezirow used John Dewey's pioneering work to create a model for "transformative learning."[40] And David Kolb united research on "cognitive development" with empirical studies on how leaders learn from their experiences to create a learning-styles model called "experiential learning."[41]

What these three perspectives have in common is a similar process for connecting reflection on experience with strategies for action. Figure 1 shows the processes each author defines. And rather than go through each author's perspective individually, I will explain a process that unites all four - a process for constructing faithful action (see Figure 2). Each of the authors has defined a process that moves from description, to reflection, through construction, and then to

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37 Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology,* on his debt to Gadamer, see 34ff.

38 Groome writes that "Piaget is a philosopher, a biologist, a logician, and a psychologist, but he is most accurately described as a genetic epistemologist. Epistemology [is] the study of the process and nature of human knowing." Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing our Story and Vision* (New York: HarperSan Francisco, 1980), 239.

39 Groome, *Christian Religious Education,* 184-206; the most accessible summary of the cycle outlined here can be found in Groome, "Theology on Our Feet."

40 For an overview of his ideas, see Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991); for a summary of the connection between meaning making and transformative learning, see Jack Mezirow, "How Critical Reflection Triggers Transformative Learning," in *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning,* Jack Mezirow and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990), 1-20; on the connections between Mezirow, Kolb, and Freire, see Kathleen Taylor, Catherin Marienau, and Morris Fiddler, *Developing Adult Learners* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000) 22ff.

41 Kolb's seminal work is *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984); the most accessible explanation of Kolb's cycle can be found in Chapter 3 of his textbook, *Organizational Behavior: An Experiential Approach,* 6th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995); on the usefulness of his model for uniting disparate disciplines, see Kolb, "Learning Styles and Disciplinary Differences," in *The Modern American College,* ed. Arthur W. Chickering and Associates, 232-255 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981); on its implication for teaching, see Marilla Svinicki and Nancy M. Dixon, "The Kolb Model Modified for Classroom Activities," *College Teaching* 35:4 (Fall 1987): 141-146 and especially James Anderson and Maurianne Adams, "Acknowledging the Learning Styles of Diverse Student Populations: Implications for Instructional Design," in *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, Number 49,* ed. Laura Border and Nancy Van Note Chism, 19-33 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992).

strategy. Then the cycle begins again. In describing a cycle, one runs the risk of implying that the orderly process is the same each time a person walks through it. That is not the intent of this model. People sometimes work without following the exact order. They do not proceed consciously around the cycle, nor do they move around it only once. The model is not individualistic either in that this theologizing process is often a communal process where different people within the community share their giftedness at different points along the circle. And, finally, the move between construction and strategy (what Browning calls the move from systematic theology to strategic theology) is not a simple move from theory to practice. As will become clear, the reflective step early in the process implants the seeds of action before the theory is fully formed. The cycle is, therefore, a model for constructing faithful action - but it is not the only process one might follow.

A. *Description*

The process for constructing faithful action that Browning, Groome, Mezirow, and Kolb share begins with description.[42] Max DePree has said, "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality."[43]   And, by extension, this model argues that the first responsibility of a religious leader is to define reality theologically and spiritually.   The description of present circumstances is a profoundly interpretative process.   It signals which portions of "experience" are most salient and which segments of a community's story deserve to be remembered.   The process is also layered, as we shall see, in that a leader must account at one time for pastorals concerns about individual persons, for organizational concerns about the community and about spiritual concerns about theology. The process also attempts to set out just how the entire "culture of the community" (a phrase that will be explained below) participates in the situation being described.

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[42]   At this node, I draw more heavily on Browning than Groome or Kolb. Groome takes the "naming of present praxis" to be a relatively uncomplicated first step in that he does require a great deal of rigor in what the naming entails. I believe that Browning's treatment is an extension of the spirit that Groome intended. Kolb, on the other hand, personalizes the process by making "concrete experience" an unmediated event that simply happens to an individual. There is no interpretation or explanation necessary in order to appropriate the event. In this way, I have perhaps gone beyond the meaning that Kolb intended. But I think that this is necessary for two reasons. First, I am convinced by Browning's argument that each "experience" is open to a host of interpretations and these interpretations begin long before any reflective process has a chance to shape them. And, second, my interest in making this theologizing process a process that communities can follow as well as individuals means that any one "experience" can have a host of interpreters and therefore a host of equally legitimate interpretations. Thus, the descriptive move is the necessary first step as a means to declaring a communal understanding of just what happened. Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology;* Groome, "Theology on Our Feet"; Kolb, *Organizational Behavior,* 49ff.

[43]   Max DePree, *Leadership is an Art* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1987), 11.

Descriptive
Theology

Strategic   Historical
Theology   Theology

Systematic
Theology

Don S. Browning's
"Fundamental Practical Theology"

Naming Present
Practice

Commitment to   Critical
New Praxis   Reflection

Mutual   ←   Encounter with the
Critique   Christian Story

Thomas Groome's
"Shared Praxis"

Concrete
Experience

Active   Reflective
Experimentation   Observation

Abstract
Conceptualization

David Kolb's
"Experiential Learning"

Experience

Choose Plan of   Reflect on
Action   Assumptions

"Reformulate"
Assumptions

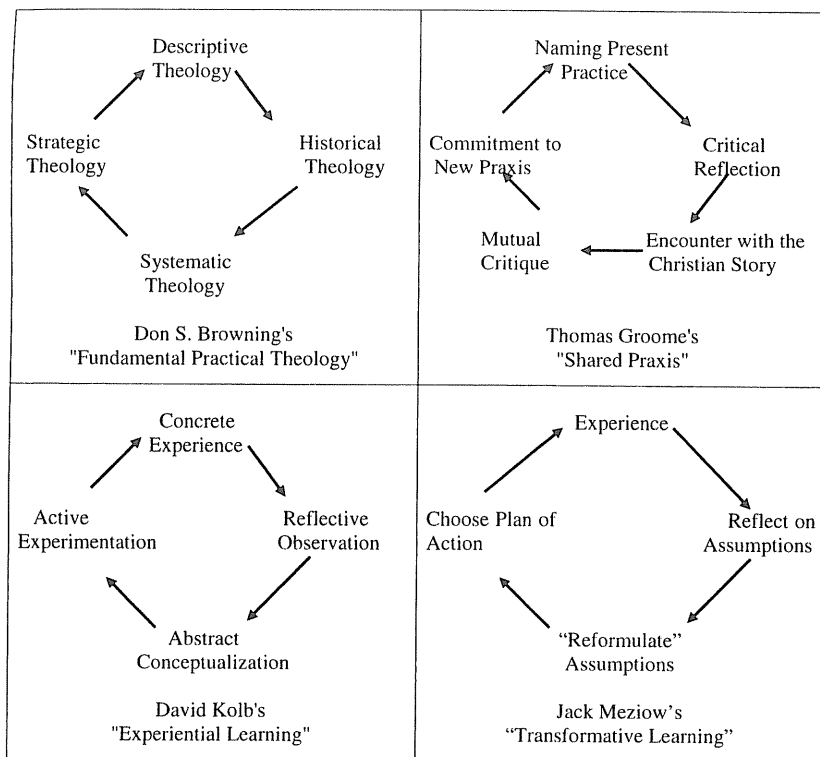Jack Meziow's
"Transformative Learning"

Figure 1

This ultimately theological and spiritual process of description begins, however, with investigations that may at first glance seem devoid of spiritual content. The so-called analytical disciplines of sociology, psychology and organization theory often help bring depth to the description. These disciplines include, for instance, reminders about the importance of gender relations and the inter-play of racial-ethnic cultures. They enable religious leaders to ask questions of their situation that they would never have thought to ask on their own. For example, in the case study that opened this essay Clare Morgan began by making observations about Grace Church, about the Sunday School Superintendent Angela Michaels and the treasurer Gilbert

Gaddis.   Clare's rudimentary training in psychology and sociology shaped those observations.   They gave her the names and the vocabulary that she used to describe what she saw happening and what she expected to happen.   She "knew" how debilitating it would be psychologically for Angela to be shot down or berated at her first meeting with the church board. She understood that Gil was "on a journey" in that she had seen him take significant steps towards controlling his own controlling personality.   Clare's theological understanding of pastoral care meant that these simple psychological "observations" - the kind that lay leaders and clergy make as a matter of course - structured her responses as soon as she made the observations. She knew that whatever strategies she would eventually construct had to meet Angela's psychological need for affirmation at her first meeting and respect Gil's growth process in mastering his own controlling personality.   The descriptive process was interpretive from the start.
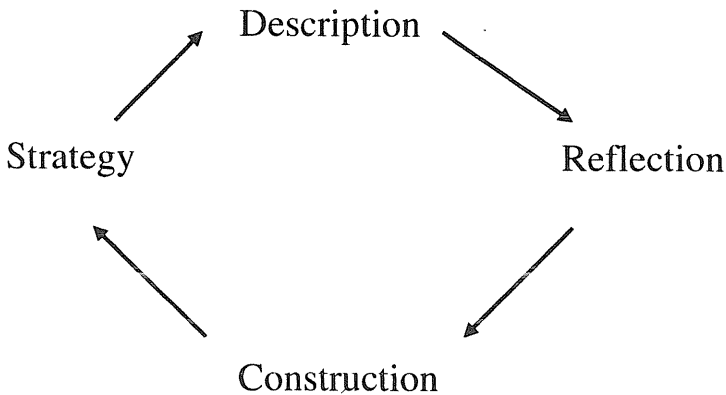

Figure 2

1. MULTIPLE LAYERS: PASTORAL, ORGANIZATIONAL, THEOLOGICAL

These "psychological" concerns for the individual participants are only part of Clare's descriptive process. The theologizing cycle being developed here is layered in that each node in the cycle details personal/pastoral concerns,

communal/organizational concerns and spiritual/theological concerns.[44] In addition to caring for Gil and Angela, Clare observed that there were important organizational concerns embedded in this situation. Does the treasurer have veto power over all purchases? She answered an immediate and emphatic, No. Did the Christian Education committee act within its purview when it decided to change the curriculum? Clare believed that it did. But then she immediately had to ask whether or not the Church Board had the right and responsibility to overturn or "instruct" the Christian Education committee when the board collectively determined that the education committee had erred. Once again, Clare answered in the affirmative. This immediately signaled for her a tension built into the polity of her congregation. Angela would be correct in assuming that the Christian Education could and should act without guidance from the board. And the board would be just as "correct" in assuming that it could supercede the committee. In other words, both Angela and Gil could be "right" from an organizational perspective.

There were also spiritual and theological concerns to take into account. Some of the theological questions are plain. There is a clear theological division between the "Christ-centered" curriculum of the Christian Education committee and the denominational curriculum favored by Gil's older generation. But there are deeper theological concerns involved as well. Clare's own theology of ministry shapes how she encounters the various parties. She has taken a more inclusive and participatory stance in relating to the Church Board, although the polity of her denomination leaves room for her to have taken a more hierarchical and authoritarian approach if she so desired. Indeed, theological decisions about authority and power loom large in this situation. A leader pursuing faithful action must work at a spiritual level, and not just at personal and organizational levels.

The reason that this layered approach is important is that leaders often find that the requirements of the various layers conflict with each other. A good organizational response may

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[44] For a more detailed explanation of these three perspectives and of the models of ministry embedded in each, see Scott Cormode, "Multi-layered Leadership: The Christian Leader as Builder, Shepherd, and Gardener," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 1:2 (Fall 2002): 69-104.

be pastorally inappropriate. It might, for example, allow the Grace Church board to exert its legitimate authority over Angela Michaels and her Christian Education committee. That could be, however, personally devastating to Angela. Likewise, an affirming pastoral response may exacerbate organizational problems or be theologically untenable. At each point along this process for constructing faithful action there needs to be a layered approach to theologizing.

2. UNDERSTANDING CULTURE(S) AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

In addition to a layered approach, the description that initiates the theologizing cycle must take into account the culture of the context within which the theologizing occurs. Culture is in this case a technical term. It means more than the ethnic or racial culture represented within a congregation or religious community. It refers to the patterns of social interactions that hang together according to a number of shared assumptions. It is a collection of mutually-reinforcing symbols, behaviors and rituals. Thus one can speak of an organization, or more specifically a congregation as having a culture. Understanding the cultures within which a situation occurs is crucial to the theologizing process because, as will become clear, the cultural milieu defines the parameters for acceptable action and defines the "cultural resources" out of which that action is constructed.[45]

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[45] There are two camps of scholars who interpret culture in opposing ways, according to Michael Schudson. One camp believes that culture limits social action by imposing ideas and symbols that restricts the ability of social actors to imagine alternative strategies for action. Marxists were once the chief proponents of this perspective, although neo-institutionalists have recently added instead a less ideologically-charged and therefore more instructive means of describing how culture restricts the range of legitimate options. The other camp, according to Schudson, sees culture as a "set of ideas and symbols available for use" as resources for social action. Instead of seeing symbols shaping people, this second group believes that people shape the symbols. I believe that both groups are correct. Culture does restrict the range of legitimate options - but people then mix and match these legitimate options to create recombinant options that can be used as resources. Michael Schudson, "How Culture Works: Perspectives from Media Studies on the Efficacy of Symbols," *Theory and Society* 18 (1989): 153-180; on neo-institutionalism, see Walter Powell and Paul DiMaggio, eds., *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); on religion and culture, see Robert Wuthnow and Marsha Witten, "New Directions in the Study of Culture," *Annual Review of Sociology* 14 (1988): 49-67 and Robert Wuthnow, "Religion as Culture," *Religion and Social Order* 1 (1991): 267-283, esp. 280-283.

Understanding the interpretive power of culture is connected to the earlier assertion that the first responsibility of a religious leader is to define spiritual reality. Religious leaders inhabit a world of interpretation, a "rhetorical reality" where defining the categories people use to interpret their lives is extremely powerful. The right to interpret is nothing less than the authority to define the cultural rules that arbitrate human interaction. American historians, for example, have shown that politicians and preachers competed in the early republic to define the course of the nation. Each group sought to speak into being an interpretation of society that definitively described what was most important in public life. Republicans proclaimed that politics was the nation's hope and individual rights its most cherished value. Federalist clergy, on the other hand, believed with their Puritan forebears that government was dependent on religion, arguing that public virtue was more important than individual rights. The crucial point is, as one scholar said, "the early republic encompassed a plurality of rhetorical worlds competing for popular audiences."[46] This interpretative authority was so important in the developing nation that power lay with the very few people in society who had a public voice; one historian called them the "speaking aristocracy."[47] The authority to craft the categories people use to describe the experiences of life is the power to define reality.

Acknowledging this interpretative power lay at the heart of the recent tendency for secular and religious scholars alike to emphasize organizational culture. Culture, they have shown, defines the categories people use to make sense of their world. They proclaim that culture provides the tools that people use to construct understandings of daily life and to cobble strategies for action in society. For example, the sociologist Robert Wuthnow and the theologian John Cobb, coming from remarkably different scholarly points of view, each conclude that the root of the "crisis in the mainline

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[46] Harry S. Stout, "Rhetoric and Reality in the Early Republic: The Case of the Federalist Clergy," in *Religion & American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the 1980s,* ed. Mark A. Noll, 62-76 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[47] Christopher D. Grasso, "Between Awakenings: Learned Men and the Transformations of Public Discourse in Connecticut, 1740-1800," unpublished dissertation, Yale University, 1992.

churches" is their failure to meet their weekly responsibility to, in Wuthnow's words, "relate theology to everyday life."[48] This is why Cobb asserts that the churches must "renew their theological vocation."[49]   Likewise, Nancy Tatom Ammerman found that the congregations that thrived in the face of crushing local change were those that were able to transform their congregational cultures. In such a thriving congregation, the pastor's role is interpretative, "making sense of what is happening in the world in light of the sacred texts and traditions of faith" that form the core of the congregation's cultural identity.[50]   Indeed, leading sociologists of religion believe that "the sacred [itself] may now be regarded as a form of culture," one that religious leaders "enact" when they apply religious categories to daily life.[51] Understanding and transforming congregational culture may be the key to effective pastoral leadership.

Perhaps a religious leader's most important interpretative task is to make plain the theological essences that animate the daily tasks of religious life, reminding a congregation or other religious organization that each activity is laden with theological importance regardless of its deceptively-secular appearance. Such a view transforms meetings into exercises in discerning the will of God for a community; and the task of recruiting volunteers becomes an invitation for believers to participate in the communal ministry of God's people. These theological essences are not a religious garb we use to clothe what would otherwise be an essentially secular activity. They must be the core of the act, the beating heart that animates the living practice. A reflective practitioner named Eugene Peterson explained the essence of ministry this way, "With

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48   Robert Wuthnow, *The Crisis in the Churches: Spiritual Malaise, Fiscal Woe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 7.

49   John B. Cobb, Jr., *Reclaiming the Church: Where the Mainline Went Wrong and What to Do about It* (Louisville: Wesminster J. Knox Press, 1997), vii. On the need for partnership between churches and seminaries in renewing this theological vocation, see Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, "Friends in the Family: Church, Seminary and Theological Education," in *Beyond Clericalism: The Congregation as Focus for Theological Education,* ed. Joseph C. Hough, Jr., and Barbara G. Wheeler, 49-60 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

50   Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 53.

51   Robert Wuthnow, *Producing the Sacred: An Essay on Public Religion* (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1994), 2, 27; N.B. "Institutional isomorphism" plays an important role in channeling religious ideas and sacred interpretations (pp. 30ff as well as Ammerman, *Congregation and Community,* 45, 46).

professions integrity has to do with the invisibles: for physicians it is health (not just making people feel good); with lawyers, justice (not just helping people get their own way); with professors, learning (not cramming cranial cavities with information on tap for examinations). And with pastors it is [faithfulness to] God (not relieving anxiety, or giving comfort, or running a religious establishment.)"[52] Another practitioner, Thomas Jeavons, put the point more succinctly. The difference between ministry and other professions, he said, is that for religious leaders "the bottom line is faithfulness."[53] Religious leaders remind people that the most important standards are sacred and the most cherished values spiritual, a fact that guides religious groups into making decisions using a profoundly different set of criteria than they might use outside the church. When leaders define reality this way, they enable their people to see themselves not as members of a club or business, but as believers engaged in a profoundly spiritual activity.[54]

Religious leaders, as interpreters of reality and producers of culture, work differently than business leaders do. Business leaders strive to control their worlds by gathering monetary resources, accumulating votes and writing regulations.[55] Their power is coercive, and their authority

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[52] Eugene Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 7.

[53] Thomas H. Jeavons, *When the Bottom Line is Faithfulness: Management of Christian Service Organizations* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). Jeavons's work is a good example of the ways that the term "ministry" must include religious leaders who are not necessarily engaged in ordained, parish ministry. The leaders Jeavons describes minister in social service agencies and see their labor as a calling from God.

[54] My thinking on this point, and my vocabulary, have been influenced by Alasdair MacIntyre's understanding of practices, especially as mediated through the theological perspectives of Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass. What I call the "theological essences" that animate a pastor's activity are not unlike what these authors call "the goods internal to a practice." The best summary of these ideas and their application to theological education is Craig Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practice," in *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education,* ed. Barbara G. Wheeler and Edward Farley (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 35-66; cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); and Dorothy Bass, ed., *Practicing our Faith: A Way of Life for Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997).

[55] John Kotter of the Harvard Business School draws a distinction between management and leadership on just this point. He concludes that "good management controls complexity [while] effective leadership produces useful change."

restrictive.[56] Religious leaders rarely have access to this kind of structural authority.[57] They cannot enforce their will, nor should they wish to. Instead, religious leaders rely on rhetorical authority, the power to convince and cajole - but not to coerce. They cannot make people obey them, but they can inspire people to follow them. What they lack in structural resources they make up for with cultural resources.[58]

His work is one of many recent examples where management scholars are arguing that the controlling model that has dominated business education must give way to a model of interpretation and inspiration. No less an authority than Peter Drucker proclaims that the new model for leadership can be found in the churches, where "mission" is more important than "expediency" and "accountability" more prevalent than "control." John Kotter, "What Leaders Really Do," *Harvard Business Review* 68, no. 3 (May-June 1990): 3-11; Peter Drucker, "What Business Can Learn from Nonprofits," *Harvard Business Review* 67, no. 4 (July-August 1989): 88-93.

[56] This control model may be losing its efficacy even in the business world. For example, Peter Drucker has observed that the "post-capitalist executive" will have to learn to lead without relying on the trappings of hierarchical power. "You have to learn to manage in situations where you don't have command authority...where you are neither controlled or controlling. That is the fundamental change." Drucker, "The Post-Capitalist Executive: An Interview with Peter Drucker," *Harvard Business Review* 71, no. 3 (May-June 1993): 115, quoted in Jay A. Conger, *Winning 'Em Over: A New Model for Managing in the Age of Persuasion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998) 180; cf. Conger, "The Necessary Art of Persuasion," *Harvard Business Review* 76, no. 3 (May-June 1998): 84-95.

[57] The sociological distinction between culture and structure is an important part of this analysis. Structure describes categories and characteristics that are formal and often unchanging. Authority assigned by law (e.g. the authority of a police officer) and demographic characteristics such as gender and age are structural categories. They are open to very little interpretation (granting the degree to which some might want to re-interpret gender as a category). Cultural characteristics, by contrast, rely almost solely on interpretation for their meaning. Authority may be assigned, for example, but it does not always translate to power (as any pastor will tell you). On the distinctions between structure and culture specifically as they apply to religion's power and authority, see N. J. Demerath and Rhys Williams, *A Bridging of Faiths: Religion and Politics in a New England City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) esp. 170-172, 284-286.

[58] This section draws heavily on ideas that I have detailed in my dissertation, which asked how voluntary associations (secular and religious) created solidarity and built commitment in turn-of-the-century urban America. I found that voluntary associations structured their members' lives around ethnic loyalty, brotherhood, sisterhood and class-consciousness in just the same way that churches organized their members' lives around faith. My use of the term "cultural resources" derives from Rhys H. Williams's work on the means by which social movements propagated. I have expanded his original discussion of ideology as a cultural resource, and made ideology one among five cultural resources that I found at work among voluntary associations a century ago. See especially Rhys H. Williams, "Social Movement Theory and the Sociology

Cultural resources are the building blocks that leaders use to construct their interpretations of the world.[59] Each captures a different sense of what religion means and each defines a different element of what is most meaningful about the religious group's communal understanding of itself. I have identified five such cultural resources: community, ideology, norms, goals and narrative (Table 1). The culture of each congregation or religious organization (and of each sub-group therein) tends to have within it some combination of these resources.[60]

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of Religion: 'Cultural Resources' in Strategy and Organization," PONPO Working Paper #180, Program on Non-Profit Organizations, Yale University, 1993. Scott Cormode, "Faith & Affiliation: An Urban Religious History of Churches and Secular Voluntarism in Chicago's West Town, 1871-1914," unpublished dissertation, Yale University, 1996.

[59] My thinking on this point draws on work from social movement theory and neo-institutionalist organization theory combined with the widely-used but under-theorized notion that culture works like a tool-kit. With the neo-institutionalists, I emphasize the idea of legitimation (what DiMaggio calls "cultural entrepreneurship") as the means by which new cultural resources are made available for public use. From Swidler, I take the idea that once cultural symbols are legitimated they can be wielded like tools - that is, separated from or "loosely-coupled" with the logics that originally legitimated them. And, from the social movement theorist, I learned that these pre-legitimated symbols and systems of thought can become "resources" that may be used to mobilize a group or justify an action. On culture as tool-kit, see Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51 (1986): 273-286; On neo-institutionalism, see Paul DiMaggio, "Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century Boston," *Media, Culture and Society* 4 (1982): 33-50; Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality," in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis,* ed. Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio, 63-82 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); on "logics," see Roger Friedland and Robert R. Alford, "Bringing Society Back In: Symbols, Practices, and Institutional Contradictions," in *The New Institutionalism* (see above), 232-263, and Harry Stout and Scott Cormode, "Institutions and the Story of American Religion: A Sketch of a Synthesis" in *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations,* ed. N.J. Demerath III et. al., 62-78 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and on "social movement ideology as a set of 'cultural resources,'" see Rhys Williams, "Rhetoric, Strategy and Institutionalization: Social Movements and Cultural Resources," paper presented to the annual meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Washington, D.C., October 1992.

[60] A fuller description of the implications of cultural resources for leadership appears in Scott Cormode, "Leading with Cultural Resources: Management Lessons from Voluntary Associations," unpublished paper presented to the Research Colloquium, Peter F. Drucker Graduate Management Center, April 1997.

Community describes the connections that hold a group together and the boundaries that separate it from the outside world. In Clare Morgan's Grace Church, the "old guard" is committed to the denomination and its ethos. They do things the denominational way because it expresses something about who they are and where they have come together. They do not see themselves as one among many groups in the parish. Rather they take it for granted that they define the center of congregational gravity. They are quite clear about what defines the boundaries between insiders and outsiders, and they jealously guard the internal ethos lest someone take away the denominational core around which they define themselves.

Clare might find this communal identity useful as she seeks to motivate her congregation. She can appeal to their notion of themselves. For example, the "old guard's" denominational loyalty brings with it a wealth of denominational resources ranging from polity structures to denominational officials. Each of these communal resources are available to Clare as she strives to inspire her congregation.

Ideology describes the beliefs that are central to a group's self-understanding. In Christian contexts, theology is the heart of ideology. Many Christians make theology tantamount to Christianity itself, taking for granted that subscription to particular theological tenets is the boundary line between sacred and profane, between Christian and non-Christian. At Grace Church, the young families who chose the Sunday School curriculum that was the "most Christ-centered" were making a theological statement. Such an emphasis on theology went against the dominant culture of this mainline congregation, which tended to make behavior and activism more important than any particular belief. Reverend Morgan had begun to re-introduce theological themes to the congregation, even before Angela's cohort came along. In fact, the theological depth that Angela heard in Clare's sermons was the main reason she had joined Grace Church. Theology shapes a congregation's culture, even in its conspicuous absence.

Norms and values describe, in contrast to theology, the values that are most important to a religious organization.

Norms are the constantly-negotiated, always-changing rules of interaction that govern the congregation's communal life. For example, Grace Church values fairness. A decade ago, the congregation helped stop a developer from evicting a group of Hispanic families from a local apartment complex. They did not appeal to an ideology (e.g. claiming racism is unconstitutional). Instead they mobilized a campaign under the simple but effect slogan, "It's not fair," blanketing the neighborhood and flooding the City Council chamber with red and green placards. And, while it is not clear to an outside observer that the congregation's efforts were the reason the developer crumbled, the slogan still carries tremendous weight in the congregation, especially among the activists who worked hard on the campaign. A former pastor often used fairness as a common sense yard-stick for measuring the worthiness of church programs. Behaviors such as fairness are thus resources that leaders can apply to any number of situations.[61]

Parish leaders can also draw on *goals* as a resource to motivate or inspire a religious people. Churches will often band together, even in the face of differences, when they are pursuing a common goal. This is particularly true when the goal is more than just a project. When the community of faith believes that it has a core purpose - a reason for being - then it is much easier to put aside other differences. For example, Clare's predecessor rallied Grace Church to aid the Hispanic families who faced eviction by convincing the parish that the soul of the congregation was at stake. He argued that the reason Grace Church existed was to stand for justice in the local community, and that if they could not take a simple stand on so obvious an injustice then they had forfeited their mandate. For him, fairness was the rudimentary necessity on which justice stood. An ideological discourse on justice was not going to be as effective within his congregation as a simple goal. Taking a stand became an end unto itself. It was the resource he used to unite his church.

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[61] On the importance of norms in shaping a culture, see especially Robert Orsi's discussion of Italian Harlem, where *rispetto* (respect) was the most potent value that Italians were trained to embody. Robert Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

Finally, the most ambiguous but the most powerful resource that a pastor can use to inspire a parish community is *narrative.* Stories weave the other resources together. A well-placed story can be far more effective than the most rigorous theological argument or the most pristine appeal to values. Stories allow people to imagine themselves at the beginning of the tale and then see themselves participating in the plot. They then can imagine themselves changing over time. Narrative provides the structure that can tie together community, theology, values and goals.

Description is thus the first step in the reflective cycle. It involves seeing a situation from organizational, interpersonal, and theological perspectives. And it involves seeing the many cultural resources available to a leader, especially community, ideology, values, goals, and narrative.

B. Reflection

After a leader has described a situation, the next step is to reflect on the situation in light of the Christian tradition.[62] In this process, the leader develops theological categories that explain the spiritual reality submerged beneath the initial situation. It is a hermeneutical process of defining and describing current experience in specifically Christian terms.

Most of theological education is devoted to instilling in the leader the tools to make possible this kind of reflection. Biblical studies courses teach students how to understand the biblical texts. Theology classes introduce the categories that students can use to collate, categorize and manipulate the ideas other people have had about how experience connects to the biblical tradition. History courses chronicle the development of these theological ideas and the myriad ways that faithful men and women over the centuries have struggled to bring the ideas into their own time and context. In this way, the theological disciplines are like the language of faith. It is all but impossible for a Christian to describe the ultimate meaning of any experience without using the terms, concepts and constructions that come from the Bible, theological tradition and the historical record.

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[62] Let me emphasize once again that these nodes are separated for the purpose of explaining them and to help leaders think through a situation. In reality, reflection and description cannot be so cleanly separated. These are heuristics, not attempts to describe cognition.

It is not, however, a straight-forward march from description to reflection. Description often incites more questions than the leader can answer from immediate access to Christian wisdom. It often takes research and hard work before one is able to gain the perspective that reflection requires. A number of observations can be made about this problematic and productive process of reflection.

The reflection process is a communal process. A leader may spend time alone in reflection. Indeed, many find that reflection begins with moments of isolation and solitude. But it cannot remain isolated from the community of faith. The role of a leader is not, I believe, to reflect <u>for</u> a community, but to reflect <u>with</u> them. Leading reflection often requires a leader to bring the tools of reflection such as Scripture passages, historical narratives and theological concepts to a community and then to help them make their own communal sense of the juxtaposition.[63] Leaders who reflect in isolation are subject to blind spots and idiosyncrasy.

Reflection must also be more than conversation. One commonly-read seminary text defines theological reflection as "experience in conversation with tradition." The Christian tradition, I believe, provides more than a "reliable source of guidance" akin to other sage records. [64] I would say that the goal of theological reflection is to describe the deep theological meaning - the profound spiritual activity - displayed in daily life. Its purpose is both illustrative (i.e. to flesh out the theological abstractions) and formative. We will sometimes encounter lessons that we do not want to learn and ideas we are reluctant to accept. Reflection only is theological, then, to the extent that the unified voices of the Christian tradition have the power to form our lives by our encounter with them.

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[63] The word "juxtaposition" here is intentionally ambiguous to the extent that it combines a number of ways that reflection can be interpreted. For example, Stone and Duke distinguish "theology as interpreting," "theology as correlating," and "theology as assessment." The idea of "reflective juxtaposition" is intended to suggest elements of each. Stone and Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 26-37.

[64] Patricia O'Connell Killen and John de Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), *viii;* Whitehead and Whitehead, *Method in Ministry*.

C. CONSTRUCTION

The problem for many of us in reflecting on the Christian witness, however, is that the voices are not unified and the direct application to our time and experience is often illusive. This was in earlier generations considered a straight-forward process of finding the center of gravity, as it were, in the texts. But it is the part of the theologizing process that, in our time, is subject to the greatest debate. The debates on theological method, for example, have begun to over-shadow within the academic discipline of theology the more traditional debates about the meaning and interpretation of doctrines. Post-modernism's relativizing influences are most keenly felt in this stage of theologizing.[65] Indeed, many of our students have been so enamored with post-modernist ideals that they worry that any constructive move is, to some extent, dangerous because it has the potential to marginalize other people's ideas and commitments.

A recent conversation with an ethicist at a leading university brought this point into perspective. He observed, initially, that the difference between teaching ethics to undergraduates in the college and teaching it to seminary students in the divinity school was that a professor had an obligation in a divinity school setting to move students eventually toward what he called, "a *telos* of resolution." He believed that people of faith must eventually move toward some conclusions about the implications of ethical reflection for communal standards of action. But as we talked it became clear that there was a growing portion of the seminary student body for whom such *"telos* of resolution" was exceedingly uncomfortable. Indeed, it seemed to violate the dominant ethic of pluralism by declaring that, at the end of the day, there were some positions that were correct and some that were inadequate. Thus, the professor reported, any time that the conversation steered too close to resolution (any resolution), the students mounted a protest. Sometimes the protests were constructive in that they were reasoned attempts to defend the unpopular position. And sometimes they were diatribes or visceral responses. The students genuinely *feared* constructive conclusions.

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[65] The essence of the debate is summarized, I believe, in the title of Alisdair MacIntyre's *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

Despite this uneasiness about construction, Christians are still left with the fact that they must act in society and they must act based on their reflective understanding of their faith. I encounter the same fears that my ethics colleague described, even though our schools are a continent apart geographically. But there is a major difference in how that fear of resolution is played out in our contexts. For example, when I teach a required M.Div. course called "Leadership, Administration and Finance," I bring students in direct contact to real-world problems that require a theologically sophisticated response. These are not large ethical discussions of social issues like abortion or race relations. They are specific cases, cases that often activate these large ethical discussions. What is most troubling about the theologizing process that I have observed in my students is that their fear of resolution leads them to skip the constructive step in theologizing - but then to proceed as if they have sketched for themselves a well-constructed theological position. In other words, they implicitly assume that the post-modernist indictment of constructive theology means that all theological positions are equally valid and therefore deserve little or no cognitive exertion.[66] The constructive process is much more complicated than many students acknowledge. [67]

One last comment needs to be made about the constructive portion of this theologizing process that aims at faithful action. Construction must be as multi-layered as description was. There are theological and spiritual dimensions to all three of the layers that we discussed earlier: the personal or pastoral layer, the communal or organizational layer, and the theological or spiritual layer. The temptation is

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[66] This is, no doubt, more problematic at "liberal" theological schools than it is at schools in the more "conservative" traditions.

[67] Perhaps the most interesting response to this problem comes from the New Testament scholar Richard Hays, who has written a magisterial discussion of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*. Creating what he calls "a framework for discernment," Hays constructs a ten-point proposal for using "the New Testament in ethical reflection." Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 462, 309, the "guidelines" are summarized on p. 310; a more accessible treatment of a similar topic is Luke Timothy Johnson, *Scripture & Discernment: Decision Making in the Church*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996). For a discussion of "how theology [as opposed to Scripture] intends to shape people for the good life," see Ellen Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

to think theologically only about the theological questions that a situation poses. But the only legitimate basis for action in the pastoral and in the communal layers is our theological mandate. Pastoral care, for example, builds on deep theological ideas about the spiritual nature of humanity and the theological obligations that faithful communities hold to every individual in their midst. Think back to the Clare Morgan case. The "theological" issues that were "described" in the first stage of theologizing had to do with the meaning of terms like "Christ-centered" and with the main theological tenets of a particular denomination. But it would be a mistake to assume that Clare's interest in protecting Angela from Gil's attacks was any less "spiritual" than her interest in preaching about belief. One of the most important moments, therefore, in the constructive stage of the theologizing process is when the leader attempts to re-construct the theological underpinnings that validate her action in *all three* layers of faithful action. In construction, the myriad perspectives that reflection identified find order and point to parameters for action.

D. STRATEGY

Many theological educators conclude the process of theological reflection when they are satisfied with the theological parameters that they have constructed. They treat the need to put their knowledge into action (i.e. the need to create strategy) as a trivial matter, akin perhaps to the decision of which lumber to use when the blueprints for a house are complete. This mistake is common to educators within and outside theological education. The eminent Stanford professor Jeffrey Pfeffer calls this the "smart-talk trap." He argues that it permeates professional education. "Smart-talk is the essence of [professional] education at leading institutions in the United States and throughout the world," he explains. "Students learn how to sound smart in classroom discussions and how to write smart things on essay examinations" but they also learn "to let talk substitute for action." This creates two problems. First, the message students receive from this style of education, Pfeffer says, is "Don't worry about your

accomplishments, just make sure you sound good."[68]   But, more devastating is what the students do not learn.   They never learn to convert knowledge into action.[69] This way of putting it may be an echo of Argyris. But it seems to repeat a "theory to practice" model of thinking/educating, which is different from the overall thrust of the paper.

The purpose of the move from construction to strategy is to convert knowledge into action. This cannot be a simple move from theory to practice. Indeed, the notion of theory itself becomes problematic when one begins to construct strategy.   Even scholars working outside of theological education recognize the bankruptcy of a theory-to-practice model. Chris Argyris and Donald Schon distinguished in the 1970s between the "espoused theories" that people said was the basis for their action and the "theories-in-use" that actually explained their decisions.   They showed how people constructed elaborate theories to guide their actions and then found themselves doing quite the opposite when they came to the point of doing the tasks.   Think back to Rev. Van Parker's attempts to create consensus by filibustering.   He espoused a theology of collaboration but in-use was a theology of dominance.   The only way to ensure that espoused theology coheres with the theology that actually guides a leader's actions is for our students to become proficient at constructing strategies that embody their theologies.[70]

The strategic phase of the theologizing process is the part of the cycle that makes faithful action effective.   The description phase makes sure it is contextual.   And the reflection and construction phases ensure that it is faithful. But strategy brings these contextualized and faithful goals to fruition. Effectiveness, therefore, requires that leaders draw on lessons that come from scholars outside of religious scholarship.   Sociologists, management scholars and

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[68] Pfeffer and Sutton, "The Smart-Talk Trap," 135-142.

[69] Chris Argyris, *Knowledge for Action: A Guide to Overcoming Barriers to Organizational Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993).

[70] Chris Argyris, and Donald Schön, *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974); on the importance of their distinction for professional education, see Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983) and its sequel, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner: Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987).

organizational theorists contribute to this phase of theologizing in just the same way that ethnographers help with description.

Thus the process for constructing faithful action involves traversing a reflective cycle. Description allows us to understand the situation on its own terms. Reflection allows us to set the situation in the context of the Christian tradition. Construction allows us to determine the ideal future toward which we strive. And Strategy allows us to construct a plan that makes future a reality. I have said earlier and will emphasize again, however, two important caveats. First, it is important to traverse the reflective cycle more than once in order to do reflection on the strategy that one proposes to pursue. And, second, that the goal is only to take the next faithful step. Leaders often get in trouble when they take a long period for reflection so that they can create a multi-step plan. Such multi-step plans are helpful - but only if, after each step, the leader pauses to traverse the cycle anew. Each step we take brings new information, which in turn necessitates reflection. The process thus provides a long-term set of goals and a caution to take only one step at a time.

NAGGING ISSUES REVISITED: FRAGMENTATION AND THE CLERICAL PARADIGM

This essay has shown that forming leaders can remain the ultimate purpose, the *telos*, of theological education if we understand that formation to be about constructing faithful action. It is, therefore, appropriate (indeed imperative) to revisit the nagging problems that the so-called "Aims and Purposes literature" placed at the top of theological education's collective agenda: fragmentation and the clerical paradigm. If this theologizing process of constructing faithful action is really going to address theological education's most pressing concerns, it must answer two questions. Is the whole of this theologizing process greater than the sum of its parts? And, does an education built around constructing faithful action avoid the clerical paradigm?

First, the unity question. The goal of the theologizing process is to understand or make sense of a particular situation in such a way that one constructs actions that embody the beliefs that one holds most dear. Specifically, a

person or group wants to limit its available options so that it only pursues those that are faithful to Christian wisdom, effective in accomplishing what it seeks to do, and appropriate to the particular context of the situation. Perhaps the most helpful scholarly perspective on such a process comes from the social psychologist Karl Weick, whose work combines a philosopher's interest in epistemology with a social scientist's need for empirical research. He argues that "soliloquies define cognition" in that people and groups construct their understanding of reality by creating mental conversations between the authorities that they allow inside their heads.[71] Building on William James's pioneering work, Weick has created the term "enactment" to describe the process by which person or groups transform undifferentiated experiences into an ordered set of memories that become "reality." "Enactment cues which parts of 'experience' are salient," he observes. And it is this filtering process that "defines interpretation." Enactment is, then, both a "self-fulfilling prophecy" and a legitimate "social construction of reality."[72] What he means by this is that people and organizations can choose which filters they will privilege in the filtering process of interpretation. Beliefs obviously play an important role in this filtering process. They "influence what people notice and how events unfold" because "to believe is to notice selectively."[73] Thus, people and organizations "implant that which they later rediscover" and in doing so "create the environments that subsequently constrain their actions."[74] Therefore, an "enacted environment" is for Weick a set of self-imposed constraints that interpret experience and construct action based on previous decisions about what matters most in the world.

For example, people who believe that there is no God blind themselves to God's action in the world. And, conversely, those who believe that the Holy Spirit intervenes

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[71] Karl Weick, "Enactment Processes in Organizations," in *New Directions in Organizational Behavior,* ed. Barry Staw and Gerald Salancik, 267-300 (Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger, 1982), 279.

[72] Karl Weick, *The Social Psychology of Organizing,* 2nd ed. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1979), 153-166; on Weick reliance on William James, see p. 148ff.

[73] On "belief-driven processes in sensemaking," see Karl Weick, *Sensemaking in Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 133-154.

[74] Weick, "Enactment Processes," 267, 268.

in daily life see examples of this intervention in situations large and small. Weick is not trying to make an argument for or against the existence or action of God in the world. What he is trying to say is that once a person or group has made that ontological decision, then it shapes all other interpretive observations. This has huge implications for our theologizing process because Weick argues that the interpretive voices that one privileges in interpretation become the constraints that guide one's actions. Specifically, the reflection stage of the theologizing process sows the faithful seeds that the strategy section reaps. The strategy section may draw on decidedly secular sources to determine which means to pursue. But the rigorous use of faith language throughout the entire process precludes one from employing secular means that violate spiritual ends. The language of faith that is the substance of the reflection stage filters the experiences gathered in the description phase. That faithful language is then ordered in the construction phase to create a framework for action. Then this framework becomes the self-fulfilling prophecy that the strategy phase enacts. In other words, the rigorous use of Christian categories in reflection and construction determines which strategic options are legitimate and which are unacceptable. In this way, the whole of the theologizing process is greater than the sum of its parts.

Addressing the unity problem leaves one final question. Does this theologizing process succumb to the clerical paradigm? I believe that it avoids the clerical paradigm because it is not functional, it is not clerical and it does not move in a linear fashion from theory to practice. It is not functional because it focuses on the submerged theological essences that invigorate faithful action. It would be hard to follow this theologizing process and then to go through the motions of ministry. The clerical paradigm indicts activities (duties) that are divorced from the spiritual reasons that legitimate them. This theologizing process specifically weds specific action with the theological rationales that make that action worth doing.

The process is not clerical because it applies readily to anyone leading God's people. Indeed, if Angela Michaels (the Sunday School superintendent) had been the protagonist of the case study, she could just as easily have followed the

theologizing process that we outlined for constructing faithful action. She would, of course, lack some of Clare's sophistication during reflection because she would not have had all of Clare's education in Christian wisdom. But that would not make her theologizing any less legitimate. The goal of the process is to create actions that enact the beliefs that one holds most dear regardless of how supposedly-sophisticated those beliefs are.

And the theologizing process does not make a linear move from theory to practice. Reflection sows the seeds that the strategy phase reaps. But then acting on that strategy supplies the seeds for the next round of reflection. Theologizing in the past structures current attempts to understand faithfully and to act effectively. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that the theologizing process outlined here does not succumb to the clerical paradigm.

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When Clare Morgan encountered that moment when leadership mattered, the learning that a theological school planted in her bore its fruit. It too became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Her seminary experience cultivated in her the instincts for ministry. It nurtured in her the ability to sense where and when to take the next step. Theological schools can provide practice in working through a reflective process similar to the one described in this article. It does not need to be exactly the same. We earlier discuss many other practical theologians who have written similar models (e.g. Browning, Groome, Whitehead & Whitehead). But the important thing for seminaries to do is to provide students with practice in creating faithful action. I would argue that students leaving seminary have to have instincts for this reflective process in the exact same way that teens have to have instincts for the road when they are given their license. They do not have to have mastered the nuances. But they need to have the rudiments down cold. A newly-minted driver may not be able to negotiate an icy road at night, but he should be able to carry on a conversation while driving in normal traffic. How does a scared teen learn to drive? By practicing under a watchful eye until the basics are second

nature. Likewise, I believe that seminary students can and should practice this cycle of reflection until it comes naturally to them. They need to develop instincts that tell them - to return to the Clare Morgan example - that the most vulnerable person on the Grace Church board is Angela, the newly-arrived Sunday School director. And, more importantly, our seminary students need to know instinctively that the pastor has to be aware of who is vulnerable and to ensure that the organizationally strong do not abuse the weak. Theological education must, I believe, cultivate instincts for constructing faithful action.

Can such instincts be cultivated? Let me give a final example from the world of sports, specifically from basketball. John Feinstein tells the story of a basketball player named Daryl Thomas who arrived at college with enormous physical gifts but little sense of how to use those abilities. Like many students who enroll in seminary, he had many gifts but not much talent for putting those gifts to effective use. He often became confused and would panic under pressure. But after years under a coach's tutelage, Thomas developed a feel for the game. Feinstein tells how those years of learning reaped dramatic dividends in the closing seconds of the championship game:

> There were ten seconds left when Thomas took the ball and turned to find [a much taller player] in his face. Instinct took over here - four years of developed instinct. It was almost as if Thomas could hear [his coach's] voice inside his head: *Shot-fake Daryl, shot-fake.* He shot-faked. [The defender] didn't budge. Almost any player in that situation, time running out, national title at stake, would have panicked. But all those dreary nights [practicing in the gym] were at work now. The voice was inside Thomas's head: "Don't force a bad shot. *Never* force a bad shot." Thomas looked and spotted [a teammate]...Calmly, as if it were just another Sunday scrimmage, he flipped the ball back to him [and watched as his teammate made the shot that won the championship].[75]

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75 John Feinstein, *A Season on the Brink: A Year with Bob Knight and the Indiana Hoosiers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 332-333.
    Cormode, "Constructing Faithful Action," p. 32

The instincts that he had cultivated, that had been planted in him, were the key to Thomas' success. They gave him a series of options to pursue and eventually provided him with a way to resolve the situation. His education became the voice inside his head, a cultivated instinct.

Each seminary course plants a different voice in our students' heads. Our hope is that when they encounter a situation such as Clare Morgan found at Grace Church, they would hear the seminary's wise counsel and proceed with confident wisdom.

Thus we see that neither faithfulness nor effectiveness can stand alone. Together - with context and community - they form the standard for religious leadership. Seminaries must aspire to form leaders. They cannot shirk their calling. But they must strive to nurture leaders that are faithful, leaders that work within their communities of faith to discern God's activity and participate in it. And schools must prepare leaders to translate this faithfulness into effective action, seeing their aspirations through to fruition. This is the mission to which theological schools must aspire. This is the standard that religious leaders should seek to embody. They must combine faithfulness and effectiveness working in context and with the whole community in mind in order to create *faithful action*.

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