

## **“MIND THE GAP”: CLOSING THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THEOLOGICAL METHOD, THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION, AND PRACTICAL THEOLOGY FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP**

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Recently, I was having an informal and lively conversation with a group of theology professors and pastors that eventually turned to the subject of church leadership. A few in our group were lamenting the sad state of the mainline church and the perceived failure of its leadership while others told us how they would solve the problems if they were ‘monarch-for-a-day.’ Perspectives varied widely; voices were loud and animated; the debate was rowdy and good-natured. Suddenly, without so much as a ‘how-do-you-do’, a soft-spoken, almost apologetic, question was tossed into the fray. It landed with a dull thud in the middle of the room. No one wanted to pick it up. People reclined back in their chairs, eyes lowered, no doubt wondering how to respond to such a socially naïve faux-pas. Silence continued, embarrassingly. The stultifying question? It was simple enough: “How do you think theologically about who you are and what you do as a church leader?” When no one answered, the hapless questioner continued obviously unaware of the deadening effect: “What theological methods fit your leadership and your situation best?” A few of our group responded as politely as possible, but each backed away from the topic as if it were conversational quicksand. Pretty soon, people were gathering their coats and excusing themselves, and nonchalantly dashing out the door. Of course I wouldn’t want to disclose the identity of that clueless individual, the one who wrecked what had hitherto been a perfectly delightful evening. I wouldn’t want to heap even more coals of shame on his head, and so I’ll say no more on the grounds that it may incriminate me.

But conversational etiquette aside, questions of epistemology and pedagogy - how do you go about knowing? - are as important today as they ever have been in the Western world. The present age of postmodernity, according to John

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Howard Yoder, is one in which “there is no longer any evident right answer” to theological questions.<sup>1</sup> As a result, theological discourse and action must be realms of “chastened rationality” in which we have due regard for our inherent limitations and fallibility.<sup>2</sup> Yet, especially when approaches to church leadership are multiplying exponentially and when congregations and denominations are grasping frantically for the next best thing in leadership development, is it not the responsibility of reflective practitioners and teachers to boldly commit the socially unpardonable and ask a question of theological method and education: how do we understand what church leadership is and does; and perhaps more importantly, how might we best come to know and describe the process by which church leaders (including ourselves) investigate, reflect, and act theologically?

The essays in this volume emerged out of conversations in the Academy of Religious Leadership about those very questions. In the early years of this organization’s life, it was surprising how often, regardless of the topic, we asked each other, “How did you come to that conclusion?” or “Upon what basis do you think that was the right action?” These are essentially questions of method. The question of how leaders know is not simply academic or esoteric; it is fundamentally practical. Leadership is primarily demonstrated through its exercise in action. But action, unless it is purely instinctual, is always predicated upon knowing and deciding, and upon the relational and cultural milieu in which knowing/deciding are embedded. The more clearly we can trace the procedure by which we thought through, decided, and acted, the more and better feedback we will have for the next time we need to exercise leadership.

To take differences of perspective seriously is at the very heart of Christian ministry. First, to do so grounds ministry in the reality of what it means to participate in a common life. Second, it honors the particularities of individuals. Third, to

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<sup>1</sup> John Howard Yoder, *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002), p. 233

<sup>2</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, “Conversing in Christian style: toward a Baptist theological method for the postmodern context,” *Baptist History and Heritage*, 1/1/2000; accessed at <http://www.highbeam.com/library/doc3.asp?DOCID=1G1:94160872&num=1&ctrlInfo=Round18%3AProd%3ASR%3AResult&ao=&FreePremium=BOTH>.

acknowledge and accept hermeneutical differences among people is an essential step to bring persons together in communion and to reach out in mission. Fourth, to honor different ways of knowing is to acknowledge the limitations inherent to and the potential of growth in each, including our own. The more aware we become of the limited truth of our perspective, the more we can be open to redemptive transformation by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2).

What else is at stake in a conversation about theological method and leadership? More than might be expected. The church suffers from a surplus of ideologically-driven leaders who are as decisive as they are uninformed, who are allergic to complex situations and competing truths, and who regard differences of perspective as anathema. On the other hand, many of our church 'leaders' are adrift in self-satisfied relativism or stranded on the shoals of parochial traditionalism. Social and ecclesial institutions are replete with leaders who are selfishly and politically motivated rather than self-sacrificially oriented to promoting what Martin Luther King, Jr. called the "beloved community." We need leaders who first and foremost seek a transcendent wisdom and who can be committed to their convictions and decisions without being enslaved to them. The church desperately needs persons who, at God's prompting, lead it into the unknown, whether it be to Ur or into Canaan or down an Emmaus road.

This combined issue of the *Journal of Religious Leadership* enters the conversation on leadership in church and society by providing a forum in which the authors address the epistemological relation of leadership to their situations, to the larger culture, and to theologically reflective practice. A great deal of the literature on leadership in religious organizations deals with the qualities, characteristics, skills, roles, and tasks of leaders. The authors in this volume certainly delve into what leaders should be and do, but they take a different tact: they concentrate their attention not so much on leadership or its exercise, per se, but on the epistemology or hermeneutics at the very heart of it. That is, they are concerned with the patterns by which ecclesial leaders know and interpret their context, tradition, culture, and themselves so that their leadership is better informed, skilled, and strategic; in short, so they are better able to lead.

Academicians tend to talk about these matters in terms of method. Somehow, however, method is not a term used very often outside of ivory towers.<sup>3</sup> We might have the notion that conversation about method automatically becomes pedantic and narrow, and that very often shuts down or constricts the search for truth and truthful action. But method is simply another word for how we do something, the process we go through, or the recipe we follow when we set out to do anything intentionally. Conversation around method, especially *theological* method in which we are engaging the *Mysterium tremendum*, should not establish “a set of rules to be followed meticulously by a dolt,” writes Bernard Lonergan. “It is a framework for collaborative creativity.”<sup>4</sup> Discourse on theological method should open us up to the rich complexity and exhilarating depth of theologically-oriented leadership. Further, the more aware we are about our approaches to theological practices, the more effectively we can exercise leadership as we choose wisely methods which are best suited to our situations, our selves, and to our understanding of God.

Intrinsically associated with the relation of theological method and leadership is the process of educational formation in which better equipped and more effective leaders emerge in our churches. Learning is always the antecedent activity to doing something skillfully. For this reason, theological education - as the process of learning theological method for religious leadership - is a recurring theme throughout the issue. On the whole, the authors are concerned with the twin issues of leadership performance and pedagogy: a) the ways by which leaders engage their situation such that they are more theologically aware, practically effective, and spiritually attuned, and b) the processes by

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Daly has been an especially vocal critic of ‘academic’ (meaning: disenchanting and false) method: “One of the false gods of theologians, philosophers, and other academics is called Method.... The tyranny of methodolatry hinders new discoveries. It prevents us from raising questions never asked before and from being illumined by ideas that do not fit into pre-established boxes and forms. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> (93) Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1999). Cf., the contribution of Lonergan’s method to feminist theology in Gloria L. Schaab, “Feminist Theological Methodology,” *Theological Studies*, 6/1/2001, pp. 235-37.

which teachers of ministry (who might very well be church leaders) think about and train others in church leadership.

Barbara Wheeler once observed that it has become somewhat commonplace to treat theological education as a practice that requires theological critique, and this in essence produces a practical theology of theological education.<sup>5</sup> This suggests that theological formation and theological method are two sides of the same coin. Whereas theological formation refers to the institutional and interpersonal processes of learning to live faithfully and teaching and leading others to live faithfully, theological method refers to the actual courses of action through which persons live faithfully. Edward Farley's classic texts, *Theologia* and *Fragility of Knowledge*, argue this point eloquently. His basic thesis is that the current state of theological disciplines is seriously fragmented and that theological formation of church leaders suffers from a loss of its organic unity. The only widespread semblance of coherence within 20th Century theological education is a truncated professionalism—a clerical paradigm—which is a functionalist model of clergy preparation. And what characterizes the theological curriculum as a whole is a unilateral theory-to-application method. Epistemologically and theologically, this situation is inconsistent with the nature of theology, according to Farley. As a corrective, he advocates for a complete reorientation of theological study and training to the actual situations of ecclesial life, broadly conceived, such that 'reflective wisdom' regarding Christian identity and praxis (*theologia*) is cultivated.<sup>6</sup>

Farley's critique of and his proposals for theological education sparked a flurry of responses and counter proposals in the 1980's and 90's.<sup>7</sup> For our purposes, it is most important

5 Barbara G. Wheeler in *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education*, ed., Barbara G. Wheeler and Edward Farley, (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1991), p. 13.

6 Edward Farley, *The Fragility of Knowledge: Theological Education in the Church & the University*, (Philadelphia: Fortress 1988), p. ix.

7 Joseph C. Hough, Jr., and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christian Identity and Theological Education* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985); Browning, Don S., ed. *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983); Wheeler and Farley, *Shifting Boundaries*; Lewis Mudge and James N. Poling, eds. *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987); James N. Poling and Donald E. Miller, *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985); to name a few of the more prominent.

to note that consistently in each response is the fundamental presupposition: how people learn theological method affects their practice of it. We see this principle at work in all forms of education; but its truth gains greater clarity perhaps in the contradictions between professional training and practice. For example, when medical care-givers are overworked and dehumanized in medical schools, it is no wonder that doctors treat their patients impersonally. Likewise in theological schools: when clergy are trained primarily as textual interpreters, it is no wonder that congregations suffer from their lack of interpersonal skills. In light of the troubles mainline denominations are facing these days, we would do well to heed the recurring advice of the London subway: 'mind the gap,' which in this case, refers to the gaps that have arisen in the overall structure of theological education between theological methods and the practical integration of them all for the preparation of leadership.

In the past thirty years or so, the discourse on theological education has increasingly (but not wholly) settled on the preparation of leadership for the church as one of its primary goals. Emerging from this discussion is an increasing consensus that theological education is fundamentally practical: that it is rooted in a context, is part of a tradition among many traditions, is a subjective endeavor, has particular interests and goals, and either reifies or challenges the status quo. Thus, no matter how abstract and esoteric theology may *seem* to be, the practice of theology is nevertheless practically rooted and has practical effects.

### **CONSENSUS IN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

The insight that theology - as well as the knowing process in general - is fundamentally practical has led an increasing number of scholars to characterize theological education as essentially practical theology, but not practical theology as it is associated narrowly with pastoral practices. To call theology "practical" is not to raise one of the theological subdisciplines above all others. Rather, it is to recognize that theology is a practice, is rooted contextually, and has practical effects, and that the disciplines of history, dogmatics/systematics, and biblical study are submovements within an overarching

practical framework. One of the most influential advocates of theology as practical is Don Browning. His proposal to reconceive theology in light of the practical philosophies of John Dewey, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Jürgen Habermas, to name a few, is in many respects similar to and consonant with other approaches.<sup>8</sup> Browning's magnum opus, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, brings systematic clarity to the integration of practical theological method and theological education, and revises both around at least three general points of an emerging consensus that we should briefly examine.

The first broad area of consensus has to do with the *anthropological* orientation of practical theology; it is concerned primarily with interpreting human existence in all its dimensions: biological, psychological, sociological, ecological, cosmological, and theological.<sup>9</sup> But within this wide-ranging framework, practical theology focuses primarily upon human practices and the situational contexts of practices. In the literature, the terminology for the particular conception of human agency that is emphasized ranges quite widely and thus gets a bit messy and confused. Within the positions which are most compatible with Browning, we could focus upon action (as conscious or unconscious,

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<sup>8</sup> David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology*. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988); Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing our Story and Vision* (New York: HarperSan Francisco, 1980); Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains*, trans. Reinder Bruinsma (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999); J.A. Van der Ven, *Practical Theology: an Empirical Approach*, (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993); and many others.

<sup>9</sup> Groome uses the term, "epistemic ontology," to indicate the unity of knowing and *being* that constitutes human being and upon which all education depends. Groome grounds epistemology in a particular Heideggerian form of ontology, the study of "people's whole way of 'being' as human beings in the world." Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry: the Way of Shared Praxis*, (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1991. A notable exception to the limitation of practical theology to anthropology is found in the work of James E. Loder which looks beyond anthropology to cosmology as the most comprehensive frame of reference. He draws not only upon the human sciences but also upon natural sciences to demonstrate helpful convergences between scientific and theological understandings of human existence. See especially Loder, "The Place of Science in Practical Theology: The Human Factor," *International Journal of Practical Theology*, vol. 4, 2000, pp. 22-41; James E. Loder and W. Jim Neidhardt, *The Knights Move: The Relational Logic of the Spirit in Theology and Science*, (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1992).

productive or unproductive, individual or collective)<sup>10</sup>, praxis (the purposeful integration of thoughtful action and active thought), practice ("cooperative human activity that is socially established over time"<sup>11</sup>)<sup>12</sup>, or Browning's own preference for "practical wisdom" or "practical reason".<sup>13</sup> Because all thinking is intrinsically practical, we are not doing anything radically different from what we ordinarily do; the method simply and powerfully helps us to be more aware of and more intentional about the practical dimensions of thinking. To discipline our thinking so that our action is theologically informed and is consistent with divine action in the world constitutes, according to Browning, the telos of fundamental practical theology: normative ethics.<sup>14</sup>

A second area of general consensus in practical theology regards its drive for *holism* and *comprehensiveness*. Rather than focusing only upon what people think or say and its meaning for what should be done (as is characteristic of modern theologies, whether confessional, neo-orthodox, liberal, or conservative), the contemporary revision of practical theology places thought and speech in a lived context and examines the practices and results of human meaning-making.

The holistic orientation of practical theology has to do not only with the object we seek to know, but also includes the subjectivity of the knower in all its ambiguity. Even though our attention may be directed at something beyond us in order to know it, when we reflect upon *how* we know, the method, we have to take into consideration *who* it is that is

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<sup>10</sup> Action is a focal term for Heitink. However, Heitink confusingly uses praxis and action interchangeably: action is defined as two related types of praxis: "mediation of the Christian faith" and a more generic interaction of persons in society, whether explicitly religious or not; *Practical Theology*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>11</sup> Wheeler, *Shifting Boundaries*, p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Dykstra and Bass in *Practicing Theology* define practices as "things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world," p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> The Greek term for practical wisdom and reason is *phronēsis*, which Browning differentiates from *theoria* (theoretical reason) and *technē* (technical reason).

<sup>14</sup> That practical theology is most of all a process of ethical reflection is fiercely criticized by pastoral theologian, Donald Capps. In his review of *Fundamental Practical Theology* he decries the reduction of wisdom, "this profound apprehension of the deep, mysterious structure that holds all life together-like the veins of a leaf-from those who would reduce it to practical reasoning." He advocates understanding wisdom in terms of the rich and mysterious biblical metaphor, *Sophia*. *Journal of Pastoral Theology*, 2, (Sum 1992), p. 95.



knowing. *Our* knowledge (including all of our activity) is thoroughly embodied, and our bodies are thoroughly contextual. If the modern ideal of knowledge is objective and impersonal, postmodernity has exposed the fact of the embodied and embedded self in knowing. If there is one thing that postmodernity has disclosed beyond a doubt, it is the illusion of objectivity. This means, among other things, that our knowledge is inherently and unavoidably limited and fallible. Because knowledge is a human production, it is never to be confused or conflated with the object of our knowledge. Knowing is always a subjective activity, for *persons* are the knowers. Because knowing is an intrinsically personal endeavor, we can never have completely objective or comprehensive knowledge.

The intrinsic subjectivity of our knowledge is the underlying rationale for the "hermeneutical turn" in epistemology, a motif that draws upon the Gadamerian-Habermasian stream of practical hermeneutics.<sup>15</sup> The hermeneutical turn signals a shift in epistemological self-awareness from a rather naïve realism about the direct and full correspondence of one's knowledge and the object to be known. A hermeneutical perspective contributes critical self- and sociocultural-awareness to practical theological reflection. Browning's approach is self-described as hermeneutical: practical theology is understood as "critical reflection on the church's dialogue with Christian sources and other communities of experience and interpretation with the aim of guiding its action toward social and individual transformation."<sup>16</sup> Poling and Miller further emphasize the subjective dimension in critical thinking specifically as "awareness of one's method and presuppositions...[including] the willingness to revise one's perspective under certain conditions."<sup>17</sup> This implies at the very least that knowledge is to be held provisionally, scrutinized, and tested for its validity.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains*, trans. Reinder Bruinsma (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, p. 36.

<sup>17</sup> Poling and Miller, *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry*, p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> For the necessity of evaluating the validity of Christian claims, see Browning, *Fundamental Practical Theology*, pp. 69-71.

The third area of consensus in practical theology has to do with its goal: *reconstructed praxis*. Although Browning characterizes practical theology perhaps more narrowly as “practical reason,” he is in full agreement with other practical theologians that reflection is never merely a mental exercise; mental activity is always an engagement with the world that has practical effects. So, in order for reflection to be properly theological, it is to give rise to thoughtful, informed, perhaps even transformed, re-engagement in the world as a means of participating the redemptive activity of God.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE ESSAYS

The first essay by David Forney introduces the subject of epistemological perspective by inviting the reader to imagine him- or herself joining an ongoing conversation of vigorous debate around teaching evolutionary theory in public schools. Examples of various statements are given to show that the differences among the conversants have not only to do with the content of their statements but also the process of their thinking and their approach to reality. In order to understand and participate constructively in a particularly contentious conversation, it is helpful to be able to understand not only *what* they think but *how* they think, i.e., to discern their perspective and the worldview or paradigm implicit in their perspective. Forney lifts up three paradigms that are especially prevalent in the West - positivism, interpretivism, and constructivism - and identifies key assumptions within and the philosophical positions beneath them.

“Method in Light of Scripture and in Relation to Hermeneutics” by Craig van Gelder begins as well with an all-too-familiar example of a committee meeting in which the members struggle to make a decision that affects the congregation as a whole. In this seemingly banal situation the group members are having a hard time reaching consensus because they are approaching the situation in very different ways. The differences of perspectives raise the question of how each member is interpreting reality and of the philosophical and theological underpinnings of each interpretive approach. It is the purpose of this essay to do two things: a) to situate methods of interpretation within a missiological perspective that takes seriously the primacy of

biblical and theological frameworks for *Christian* interpretation; b) to trace historically in broad strokes approaches to interpretation that are most prevalent today. In particular, it is van Gelder's aim to sketch the shift from objectivistic "Enlightenment epistemology" to the more circumspect hermeneutical perspective that is aware to some extent of its process of knowing.

It might be helpful to note at this point that there are significant differences in style and content among the essays in this issue. Even though the authors engaged in a collaborative conversation at every step of planning and publishing process, and although we worked to achieve a semblance of literary continuity among the essays, we did not try to homogenize our writing. Taking the first two essays to illustrate the tensive quality of this collection, whereas Forney's essay focused primarily on a conceptual comparison of three epistemological paradigms, van Gelder explores the shift to hermeneutical self-awareness more historically, providing brief introductions to key persons and schools of thought, and covering a greater number of paradigms. A critical reader will also want to note differences in terminology between the two essays. For example, Forney and van Gelder treat interpretivism and constructivism differently. According to Forney, interpretivism is a distinct paradigm from constructivism, largely because of the relative "neutrality" of the former and the political advocacy of the latter. On the other hand, van Gelder understands constructivism - even with its explicit political commitments - to be a logical extension of the basic assumptions and research methods of interpretivism. These are but a couple of examples to illustrate the differences among the authors that have made our conversations so interesting and enjoyable during our collaboration.

The third essay is co-authored by Lisa Berlinger, an organizational psychologist who is a practicing Roman Catholic, and Tom Tumblin, a United Methodist clergyperson and seminary professor. Together they explore a complex, and at times frustrating, process at the very center of religious leadership in organizations: achieving collective discernment, understanding, and action. Especially given the foregoing essays' emphasis upon the multiple perspectives through

which persons participate in religious life together, “Sensemaking, Discernment, and Religious Leadership” offers a theoretical and practical framework for understanding the process by which persons of different perspectives actually do make sense together. Drawing upon Karl Weick’s theory of “sensemaking” - which examines how people construct common interpretations - and specific traditions of religious discernment, Berlinger and Tumblin explore processes by which religious communities can more effectively come to a common mind about what their reality is, who they are, and what they should do.

In many respects my essay, “Dwelling in the Divine Life: The Transformational Dimension of Leadership and Practical Theology,” takes its point of departure from the integration of prayerful discernment and sensemaking achieved in the previous Berlinger-Tumblin essay. Usually, our understanding and practice of theological method for leadership emphasizes cognitive agency, the competencies and power of the ego. But prayer and discernment are activities that imply that our ego agency should be at least to some degree relaxed and opened to insights that come from beyond itself. To take prayer seriously as a methodological element of meaning-making (interpretation) implies that we are positioning methods of interpretation within a larger framework that holds the possibility of transforming our identity and agency (ego) as well as our present hermeneutical paradigm. Working with an extended case study of transformation within a faith community, this fourth essay explores the nature of transformation and the ramifications of transformational logic to hermeneutics, practical theology, and the exercise of Christian leadership.

The next article, again written by Craig van Gelder, explicitly takes up where his first essay left off. But as it so happens, it also follows nicely from the foregoing essays in that it provides a specific Christian framework in which the *Missio Dei* constitutes the fundamental *raison d’être* of discernment, interpretation, and decision making. “The Hermeneutics of Leading in Mission” begins with an important assertion about the role of leadership regarding the plurality of perspectives within and among Christian communities: “Leading in mission requires an awareness of the

hermeneutical character of the interpretive process of determining choices for action and discerning what strategic action to take." To this end, van Gelder draws significantly from Gerben Heitink's *Practical Theology*<sup>19</sup> to offer an approach to leadership that involves four interpretive dimensions: text, context, community, strategy/action. To help leaders operationalize leadership in mission through discernment and strategic action, the essay concludes by describing a cyclical and communal process that includes the following actions: attending, asserting, agreeing, acting, assessing.

In the final two essays, this issue on theological method and leadership turns to consider the formation of leaders. In his essay, Russell West poses the question, "Given the fact that leadership is exercised from the core of one's being, how might education go beyond cognitive apprehension to transformation in the very center of the leader's selfhood?" His unique and creative response is a pedagogy of "reflex conditioning" that is, in part, consonant with his earlier work with the U.S. Marines as a non-commissioned instructor in "Officer's Boot Camp." The purpose of reflex conditioning is to address not only one's cognitive agency, but the core of the personality: the conative center of fundamental habits and dispositions. His teaching of leadership in a seminary context utilizes "simulation enhanced learning" in which students are immersed in a simulated game for most of a semester. The rules and conditions of the simulation provoke and elicit within students deep-seated responses which can then be addressed explicitly in order to generate more appropriate responses. "A Reflex Model of Leadership Development: A Concept Paper" not only describes the simulation but explains its conceptual framework and pedagogical rationale so that others can creatively restructure their own teaching and learning contexts.

Scott Cormode's essay, "Constructing Faithful Action: Inculcating a Method for Reflective Ministry" concludes the issue by offering his vision for theological education. Cormode understands theological education to have an overarching purpose which goes beyond the mandate of

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<sup>19</sup> E.g., Heitink's definition: "practical theology is now understood as critical reflection on the praxis of the Church in society," Heitink, *Practical Theology*, p. 3.

religious studies and beyond mere theological understanding or interpretation. Its primary task he argues is that of “preparing religious leaders to exercise their vocations” by teaching them to “construct faithful action.” He describes ministerial action in terms of its faithfulness, effectiveness, contextuality, and communality. In a sense, this provides a framework for an outcomes-based assessment of the extent to which theological education has been true to its calling and effective in its performance: are our graduates acting faithfully. The second half of the essay draws together insights from four influential scholars - Don Browning, Thomas Groome, Jack Mezirow, and David Kolb - in order to construct a process in theological education (an uber-method, if you will) that connects reflection on experience with strategies for action, all for the sake of forming leaders in the church who act faithfully.

Bringing this introduction to a close, we should acknowledge both the diversity and limitations of our conversation in this issue. The essays in this volume represent a range of academic disciplines, Christian traditions, and socio-cultural differences. No doubt, greater diversity in perspective, culture, ethnicity, age, etc., would greatly enhance the debate. We hope that our offering evokes even further conversation and increased understanding on the topic of leadership and theological method for the sake of exercising and cultivating greater leadership in church and society.