

# TE | Theological Education

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# Theological Education

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The Association of Theological Schools is a membership organization of schools in the United States and Canada that conduct postbaccalaureate professional and academic degree programs to educate persons for the practice of ministry and advanced study of the theological disciplines. The Association's mission is to promote the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public. The Commission on Accrediting of ATS accredits schools that are members of ATS and approves the degree programs they offer.

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## ***Theological Education* Mission Statement**

*Theological Education*, the journal of The Association of Theological Schools and The ATS Commission on Accrediting, is devoted to the distinctive concerns of graduate theological education in North America. The journal supports the mission of the Association and the Commission by providing those concerned with theological education—including administrators, faculty, and independent researchers—with scholarly discourse and reports on issues and trends, research findings and resources, provocative reflection pieces, and models of critical analysis and effective practices in graduate theological education.

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## Editor's Introduction

*Eliza Smith Brown*

First announced at the “Gratitude & Blessing” event in honor of Daniel O. Aleshire in April 2017, this issue represents a tribute to his 27 years of service to The Association of Theological Schools. Beginning as the sole accreditor in 1990, Aleshire became executive director in 1998. In that role, he oversaw every aspect of the work of the Association and its related Commission on Accrediting. In this, the Centennial year of ATS, nine of Aleshire’s colleagues assembled this issue of reflections on aspects of his identity and some of the topics that interested him most.

Eliza Smith Brown opens with a retrospective of Aleshire’s “Career of Impact,” in which she shares highlights of his tenure with ATS and his views on topics ranging from accreditation to diversity, global engagement, and the work of Programs and Services. In “Reading Dan Aleshire Reading Scripture,” Barbara H. Mutch examines various written works and public addresses by Aleshire to characterize his fluent use of biblical and theological vocabulary and themes, his belief in the power of metaphor, his commitment to the teaching tradition of Christianity, his pastoral imagination, and his personal testimony. In “First Impressions of a Lasting Legacy: The *Aleshire Effect* in Abbreviated Retrospective,” Christopher The offers the perspective of a relative newcomer to the ATS staff as to how Aleshire has left a way of thinking about theological education that will live on in the work of others.

Two of Aleshire’s colleagues focus on accreditation and assessment, for which he has had tremendous passion and about which he has been the authority in North American theological education. In “Accreditation Standards: A Look Back and a Look Around,” Tom Tanner summarizes 80 year of accreditation by ATS, surveys the broader world of higher education accreditation, and concludes with some thoughts on the road ahead. In “Reimagining Assessment in Theological Education (via the Appalachian Trail),” Debbie Creamer adopts Aleshire’s beloved device of metaphor to explore how assessment can be used to understand, preserve, and enhance well-loved resources . . . including those stewarded by theological schools.

Four of Aleshire’s colleagues who work in the area of Programs and Services write about ways in which the Association serves its membership—programs that represent part of his legacy. In “Shifting Vocational Identity in Theological Education: Insights from the ATS Student Questionnaires,”

Jo Ann Deasy looks at how the collection and interpretation of student data informs thinking about how theological education can most effectively shape the vocational trajectory of students. In “Embracing Diversity: Two Models of Faculty Engagement,” Deborah H. C. Gin employs empirical research—a passion of Aleshire’s—to explore how faculty come to engage multicultural education—also a passion of Aleshire’s. She concludes with a discussion of the ways schools can use these findings to change institutional structures, develop faculty, and nuance hiring practices. Stephen R. Graham, in “The Evolution of Leadership Education at ATS,” provides an overview of one of Aleshire’s most significant legacies. Lester Edwin J. Ruiz concludes the issue with “Of Beltways, Runways, and Sight Lines: Perspectives, Challenges, and Futures of ATS ‘Global Awareness and Engagement.’” He provides a century of context on how the ATS commitment to global engagement has evolved and goes on to cite complex dilemmas and challenges that this work must address, from programming to a shared understanding about partnerships and relationships.

All of these articles are offered with profound respect and appreciation for Daniel O. Aleshire and his contributions to not only The Association of Theological Schools but, more broadly, the entire realm of theological education.





# About Daniel Aleshire



# Daniel O. Aleshire: A Career of Impact

*Eliza Smith Brown*

*The Association of Theological Schools*

*ABSTRACT: Daniel O. Aleshire served The Association of Theological Schools for 27 years, 18 of them as executive director. In that role, he emerged as both a keeper of wisdom and a prophetic voice for theological education in North America, and he took a keen interest in every aspect of the Association's work. In this introduction to an issue dedicated to Aleshire, the author—who worked closely with him for nearly a decade—discusses the impact of his career and shares excerpts from an interview conducted on his final day at ATS.*

## Early career and the Readiness for Ministry project

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June 30, 2017, marked the end of an era as Daniel Aleshire spent his last day as executive director of The Association of Theological Schools (ATS). To be sure, after nearly three decades in the job, he had proven to be a strong leader of an organization of more than 270 institutional members with thousands of faculty and administrators serving hundreds of thousands of students over the years. In the course of tending to that work, he had impacted the lives and careers of many individuals. But more than that, he emerged as the prophetic voice for theological education worldwide, a keeper of wisdom and broad institutional memory as well as a visionary for the future of theological schools in a rapidly changing world. The topics selected for this issue of the journal, written by Dan's ATS staff colleagues and dedicated to his 27 years of service, represent subjects that have engaged him over the years and about which he reflected out loud on his final day in the office.<sup>1</sup>

Dan came to ATS in 1990 as associate director for accreditation, having worked his way through the professorial ranks over the course of 12 years at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. A graduate of Belmont University with an MDiv from Southern and MA

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<sup>1</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, all quotes in this article were transcribed from the interview with Daniel Aleshire on June 30, 2017.

and PhD from George Peabody College (now Peabody College of Vanderbilt University), he returned to Southern in 1978 to teach psychology and Christian ministry. He had a particular passion for formation and served as seminary director of professional studies for the last six years of his time at Southern.

Dan's earliest association with ATS, however, dated to an earlier period at the beginning of his professional career, when he had served from 1975 to 1978 as a research scientist for the Search Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota. ATS had contracted the external research organization in 1972 to develop an instrument that would assess the preparedness of seminarians for pastoral ministry, a project that would eventually lead to the Readiness for Ministry program. The \$600,000 project was the centerpiece project of ATS in the 1970s. "This was my first exposure to the ATS world," Dan recalls. "I attended my first Biennial Meeting in 1976 as the junior member of the research team as the work was being reported to the membership. Having taught formation at Southern, I had been thinking about this formational model for a long time."

The Readiness project continued to connect Dan to the Association in the 1980s as he served on the ATS Committee on Evaluation, which had responsibility for overseeing the project. "I did the redevelopment of the instruments from 1988 to 1990, and the program was renamed Profiles of Ministry and transformed into more of a student counseling resource," he recounted. "When I came to ATS in 1990, I couldn't continue some additional research on that project, as I had responsibility for all ATS accreditation at that time. But every 15 years, there's been some revision of the program and the instruments." Only in 2017 was the decision made to retire the instrument that was showing its age and to begin planning for new ways to address formation and student vocational discernment.

Dan sees vocational discernment as an issue of growing importance because "the pathway to seminary is less formational than it once was." He recalls, "Growing up, a student would attend a denominational college, then a denominational seminary. I was among the last generation for whom that model was still intact. For the most part, it's now gone, and helping students discern vocation has increasingly become a seminary responsibility."

## **Accreditation and assessment**

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Dan began his ATS career as the sole member of the accrediting staff, and his passion for accreditation has never diminished. As the membership has grown and the process has become more complex, he has overseen the evolution of a staff of six individuals, four of them serving as school liaisons and working closely with evaluation teams, one to manage the deluge of information associated with the work of accrediting, and one to provide administrative support.

Dan was part of the team that crafted the 1996 redevelopment of the Standards of Accreditation. Over the course of four years, a steering committee worked with Dan and his fellow ATS staff member, Michael Gilligan, to engage ATS member schools in conversations about what constitutes good theological education and good theological schools. Identifying the accrediting implications of perceptions of “the good theological school” was the focus of the 1994 Biennial Meeting, which led to the first of multiple drafts of redeveloped standards. The steering committee and the different working groups addressing different parts of the standards comprised representatives from 29 schools. More than 80 schools responded in writing to the first draft, and representatives from 134 schools participated in eight regional meetings to consider a second draft. A third and final draft was adopted by the membership at the 1996 Biennial Meeting. As much as he was committed to developing a set of workable tools to drive accountability in the accreditation function, Dan was equally entranced by the more philosophical conversations about excellence. This broad-reaching consultative process represented the kind of consensus building that would come to characterize Dan’s leadership of ATS for the ensuing two decades. Nearly two decades later, in 2010–2012, Dan oversaw revisions to the 1996 standards that would carry them for another ten years, again orchestrating a highly inclusive and consultative process.

In recent years, according to Dan, three forces have been at work to change the goals and the processes of accreditation. First, the public and the governmental agencies harbor growing suspicion of quality control that is an internal process, carried on without intense scrutiny by public agencies. Second, the growing cost of higher education, both at the federal level and at the level of family investment, has raised questions of value for the consumer. Third, the increasing federalization of accreditation in the United States reflects the federal government’s infusion of \$180 billion into

education, leading to a push for increased regulation to exercise control for public accountability. The challenge becomes, in his words:

How do we continue to implement the original vision of accreditation, which is about quality improvement? There's not a regulation that can be written that will improve quality . . . . My concern is that accreditation is increasingly asked to do something it was never intended to do.

## **Diversity**

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With a keen understanding of diversity in all its dimensions, Dan views the “big tent” character of ATS as his proudest legacy:

Among the many things I cherish from these decades of work with ATS, the most precious has been the opportunity to work with the widest community of Christians in North America: conservative and liberal; white and of color; evangelical and mainline; Catholic and Orthodox, US and Canadian. At a time when religious communities are building more buttressed houses for ever smaller versions of the good, this Association has enlarged a tent of meeting to include divergent theological visions and shared educational integrity. ATS is a home with fundamental differences on its boundaries and fundamental openness at its core. The human family needs good religion, and good religion needs exactly what ATS has fostered: a tent big enough to include both deep differences and common commitments.<sup>2</sup>

## **Ecclesial diversity**

Even during his earliest days of working with ATS, Dan was mindful of the ecclesial diversity of the Association—a sensitivity that would continue to characterize his leadership through the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. “Back then, we were mindful of diverse ways of understanding ministry, priesthood, etc. We’re even more diverse now . . . with a huge range of ways of being Christian reflected in the Association.”

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel O. Aleshire, remarks at Gratitude and Blessings tribute event, Pittsburgh, PA, April 23, 2017.

Today, the membership of 271 schools is 45% evangelical Protestant, 33% mainline Protestant, and 22% Roman Catholic/Orthodox.

When I came, ATS had Roman Catholic and evangelical schools, but the ethos and culture was dominated by the mainline. What has evolved is an increasingly diverse membership in which no one has to surrender his or her identity to participate in the life of the organization. Over these 30 years, we've seen . . . the creation of a culture where people can be who they are religiously, where no one has to "fake it" to fit in, and where no one ecclesial agenda represents the entire organization. When people talk about ATS, they will talk about it as the most ecumenical organization in North America.

### **Racial/ethnic diversity**

Dan championed the work of the Committee on Race and Ethnicity (CORE) beginning in 2000. ATS diversity work had begun in 1978 with the Committee on Underrepresented Constituencies, which had been established "as an effort to encourage inclusiveness in institutional and educational standards"<sup>3</sup> and which yielded curricular change in the 1980s and improvements to the lived experiences of racial/ethnic faculty and administrators in the 1990s.

Under Dan's leadership, diversity work on behalf of the membership received a new infusion of energy and funding, and CORE programming ranged from nurturing racial/ethnic faculty and administrators (2000–2005) to informational capacity building (2006–2008) to institutional capacity building through strategic diversity planning (2010–2014). It was during this time that the Diversity Folio was developed to provide resources for schools to use in their own contexts to address issues of hiring, tenure, hospitality, isolation, and curriculum. Before he concluded his tenure with ATS, Dan oversaw an extensive research initiative to evaluate the impact of CORE efforts over the preceding 14 years and to identify issues for attention in future efforts. As a vigilant champion for these issues, Dan positioned ATS not only as a valued resource but also as the venue for ongoing conversations about race and ethnicity.

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3 Daniel O. Aleshire, Deborah H. C. Gin, and Willie James Jennings, "ATS Work through the Committee on Race and Ethnicity, 2000–2014," *Theological Education* 50, no. 2 (2017): 21.

It has required discipline and intentionality to engage and sustain that level of collegial diversity in the Association, and Dan has ensured that it is integrated into every sector of the work—from committees and boards to program presenters to re-granting programs to the makeup of the ATS staff itself.

## **Global engagement**

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Engagement with constituencies worldwide has been a passion for Dan since his arrival at ATS in 1990. In the 1980s, the Association had already been heavily invested, in partnership with the World Council of Churches, in forming The World Council of Associations of Theological Institutions (WOCATI). It was assembled in an effort to help ATS schools begin to think about Christianity in the broader world. Dan recalled his earliest association with WOCATI:

I thought of WOCATI as an effort to de-parochialize schools that had been narrowly focused on national issues or just their denominations. I felt stewardship of conveying that work forward—the legacy ATS had been developing.

Ultimately, after ten years of working with WOCATI, Dan sought to broaden ATS connections with the global community. As the center of gravity of Christianity moved from Europe and North America to the Global South over the course of three decades, he came to view global engagement not just as a legacy but rather as an indisputable mandate that North American educators be engaged with Christianity where it was thriving.

My work started by being faithful to work that had been done and carrying it forward to feeling an intellectual responsibility for theological education to become globally engaged. The world looks to us. What I would hope is that we would be as attentive to the rest of the world as it has been to us.

WOCATI included associations of theological schools that had some relationship to the World Council of Churches in its membership. As important as this constituency is, it became evident that the lack of Roman Catholic and many evangelical Protestant schools limited the ability to



address theological education in the context of global Christianity. As a result, ATS pursued global engagement through its longtime involvement with evangelical Protestant, Roman Catholic, and mainline Protestant entities with a particular interest in global issues. Dan implemented a planning initiative funded by the Henry Luce III Foundation that culminated in efforts to involve all the ecclesial constituencies of ATS with a broad range of Christian families in the world.

In 2013, Dan had worked with the ATS Board of Directors to establish global awareness and engagement as one of four strategic initiatives to be supported in the coming years. Then, during his final year as executive director, he participated in the leadership that organized the Global Forum of Theological Educators (GFTE) and hosted its inaugural meeting in May 2016 near Frankfurt, Germany. The four-day forum brought together more than 100 individuals from 35 countries with a shared interest in Christian theological education to become better acquainted, to share thoughts and experiences related to the education of pastors and Christian leaders, and to better understand one another's work and contexts. The GFTE gathering gave particular attention to the *contributions* that different Christian communities and national contexts bring to Christian theological education. At the time, Dan spoke to the critical nature of such a gathering:

As the world is changing, as the worldwide shape of Christianity is changing, as Christians in other settings are invited to engage in dialogue with other world religions, as theological schools across the Christian spectrum face ever more similar problems, it becomes increasingly important for theological educators across the Christian spectrum and around the world to know and understand one another.<sup>4</sup>

## Programs and services

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Over the years, Dan sought to sustain the close partnership that ATS has enjoyed with Lilly Endowment Inc. He worked with John Wimmer and Christopher Coble to envision ways in which ATS might best corral the resources and expertise available to inform future projects that would

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4 "Global Forum of Theological Educators to Hold Inaugural Meeting," *Colloquy Online*, April 2016.

best meet the needs of the schools and, ultimately, communities of faith that their graduates serve. It was out of their collective vision that the ATS Leadership Education programs were born as well as special initiatives such as Theological Schools and the Church (2004–2007), Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation (2000–2005), Christian Hospitality and Pastoral Practices in a Multifaith Society (2009–2013), Economic Equilibrium (2009–2013), Economic Challenges Facing Future Ministers (2013–2018), and the Association’s largest project to date—the Educational Models and Practices project (2014–2018). When the Educational Models project was announced, Dan spoke to its essential role in defining the future of theological education:

It is very clear that economic stability and sustainability are inextricably linked to educational models. Without significant modifications to educational patterns and practices, financial sustainability might not be possible for many schools. This project will ensure that those necessary modifications are identified, tested, and put into practice.

In his final year as executive director, Dan worked with his Lilly Endowment partners to realize a vision that will stand as one of his most lasting legacies: The New Century Fund. The fund comprises an extraordinary grant of \$10 million from Lilly combined with \$15 million from the Association’s reserve fund for educational programs, and it is estimated that—beginning in 2021—the fund will have grown to \$30 million that will be available to support a range of programming in support of theological schools. At the time of the gift, Dan said,

Time and again, Lilly Endowment Inc. has stepped up to partner with ATS in determining and addressing the pressing needs of our member schools. The New Century Fund will position ATS to serve in a high-impact role in guiding the future of theological education to benefit communities of faith and the broader public.

Likewise, Dan collaborated with the leadership of the Henry Luce Foundation, including his former ATS colleague and, later, Luce President Michael Gilligan as well as Jonathan VanAntwerpen and Margaret Boles Fitzgerald. Perhaps the most impactful of those collaborations was the Henry Luce III Fellows in Theology program, launched in 1993, while Dan

was still working exclusively in accrediting but which flourished under his leadership and continued for a total of 24 years, supporting the careers of a total of 160 Fellows.

A scholar at heart, Dan championed the *Theological Education* journal as not only an archive of the Association's grant-funded work but also a publication venue for theological educators who had turned their scholarship attention—at least for a time—from their academic guilds to the work of administration. His contributions to that journal and to others, together with the book chapters he has written, constitute a perspective on theological education that is both retrospective and prophetically forward thinking. He also served as a coauthor of *Being There: Culture and Formation in Two Theological Seminaries*, which received the 1998 Distinguished Book Award from the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, and his *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools* was released in 2008.<sup>5</sup>

## Recognitions and tributes

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As executive director, Dan was always in demand as a speaker and a writer for school celebrations, board meetings, conferences, and other gatherings in support of ATS, its member schools, and the church. Along the way, he amassed a collection of recognitions, tributes, and awards that reflect the admiration and respect he commands among theological educators worldwide.

Adding to his 1998 Distinguished Book Award, he has been granted four honorary doctorates representing mainline and evangelical Protestant as well as Roman Catholic constituents, one of them from an Historically Black Theological School: Ashland Theological Seminary (2000), Hood Theological Seminary (2002), Oblate School of Theology (2018), and Meadville Lombard Theological School (2018). In addition, he has been honored with the Eliza Garrett Distinguished Service Award presented by Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary (2010), the Justo and Catherine González Award presented by the Asociación para La Educación Teológica Hispana (2016), and the Archbishop Michael Ramsey Medal presented by Nashotah House (2017).

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5 A full Daniel O. Aleshire bibliography follows this article.

## Closing words

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Dan Aleshire leaves a multifaceted legacy that includes a strong, growing, and collegial membership as well as a committed and able staff, a valued range of programmatic resources, and a robust funding base for future work. Looking back at his ATS tenure, the strong threads that have characterized his leadership were evident from the earliest days of his career—a nature described by his son, Jonathan, as “always a professor and always a pastor.”<sup>6</sup> His love of both empirical research and philosophical/theological inquiry, his deep concern for the vocational discernment and formation of both students and the faculty and administrators who work on their behalf, his strong sense of justice, his recognition of the gifts that each of the Association’s constituencies bring to the enterprise, and his total commitment to the enterprise of theological education have all brought value to ATS and to the schools it serves.

What also will endure as Dan’s legacy is the impact of his personal style on his staff and the thousands of theological educators whose careers he has touched over the past three decades. His warm, pastoral nature has brought private comfort and encouragement to countless individuals wrestling with personal and professional challenges in the courses of their careers. His public remarks have been described by long-time friend and colleague David Garland (former dean of George W. Truett Theological Seminary of Baylor University and interim president of the university) as “pastoral, poignant, and profound,”<sup>7</sup> with a notable reliance on scripture as his “second language.” His notably droll, self-deprecating style of storytelling, which might be likened to that of Garrison Keillor, has spun countless parables that are instructive, inspiring, and memorable. And his incomparable work ethic and unyielding commitment to the enterprise of theological education—most of the hours of the day (and night), seven days a week, dozens of publications, hundreds of speeches, millions of miles traveled—has left colleagues, friends, and family incredulous. As Dan’s colleague and friend of three decades, Barbara Wheeler (former president of Auburn Seminary), remarked at his tribute event, “Dan is the

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6 Jonathan Aleshire, remarks at Gratitude and Blessings tribute event for Daniel O. Aleshire, Pittsburgh, PA, April 23, 2017.

7 David Garland, remarks at Gratitude and Blessings tribute event for Daniel O. Aleshire, Pittsburgh, PA, April 23, 2017.

hardest working person in theological education—maybe in the history of theological education.”<sup>8</sup> David Garland added,

You may only know Dan from his incisive and sage speeches at the Biennial Meetings and many other venues, but in person this man is the most caring, extraordinarily kind, and patient person I know . . . incredibly patient with all of us, despite the burdens of traveling incessantly through these years to help make us all better in our service to God. He has been a great leader and a great counselor to all of us.<sup>9</sup>

As the next chapters of Dan Aleshire’s career unfold—with time for research and writing, an occasional speech, and consulting—his impact will continue to be felt throughout the ecology of North American theological education. For that, we are all grateful. And as ATS President Janet Clark noted at the April 2017 tribute event, “these are qualities we all would do well to emulate, each in our own spheres of leadership and influence.”<sup>10</sup>

*Eliza Smith Brown is Director, Communications and External Relations at The Association of Theological Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.*

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8 Barbara G. Wheeler, remarks at Gratitude and Blessings tribute event for Daniel O. Aleshire, Pittsburgh, PA, April 23, 2017.

9 Garland, remarks at tribute event.

10 Janet Clark, remarks at Gratitude and Blessings tribute event for Daniel O. Aleshire, Pittsburgh, PA, April 23, 2017.

## Daniel Aleshire's publications during tenure with ATS

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### Books

- Currently in preparation: *The Next Future of Theological Education*, a volume to be published as part of the "Theological Education Between the Times" series in 2019. Ted Smith, Candler School of Theology of Emory University, project director.
- *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008.
- With Jackson Carroll, Barbara Wheeler, and Penny Long Marler. *Being There: Culture and Formation in Two Theological Seminaries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

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- "Theological Education in the United States." *The Oxford Handbook for Religion and Public Education*. In press.
- "First But Not Finished: Mainline Protestant Theological Education." In *Looking Forward with Hope: Reflections on the Present State and Future of Theological Schools*, edited by Benjamin Valentin. In press.
- "Thoughts on the Future of DMin Education." *The Journal of Christian Ministry* (The Journal of the Association for DMin Education), <http://journalofchristianministry.org/>, 2017.
- "Diversity in Theological Education and Ecumenical Engagement," *Theological Education and Theology of Life: Transformative Christian Leadership in the 21st Century*, Festschrift in honor of Dietrich Werner, edited by Uta Andree, Po Ho Huang, and Atola Longkumer. Oxford: Regnum Books, 2016.
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*Daniel O. Aleshire: A Career of Impact*

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# Reading Dan Aleshire Reading Scripture

*Barbara Horkoff Mutch*

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*ABSTRACT: Drawing upon various written works and public addresses by Daniel Aleshire over the past 15 years, the author describes how Aleshire's use of scriptural analysis and references reveals much about his sensibilities and perspectives. She describes his fluent use of biblical and theological vocabulary and themes, his belief in the power of metaphor, his commitment to the teaching tradition of Christianity, his pastoral imagination, and his personal testimony.*

I would have moved anywhere for that letter. More than communicating merely the mechanics of appointment to a new job, the letter lingered on a biblical word. The word is located in the Genesis text narrating Abram's call and has been translated as both *leave* and *go*. This, wrote the letter's author, was what The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) was asking of me—to leave a life that was cherished and to go toward something that existed only as promise, trusting that the “promise of going would outweigh the loss of leaving.” Such a way of constructing meaning resonated deeply with me. I was hooked. Discovering over time that this perceptive reading of the Genesis text was not original to my letter and that others facing discernment had been counseled with a similar interpretation did nothing to diminish the way I felt. It did, however, instill in me a keen interest in how Dan Aleshire, the author of the letter, reads Scripture. If it is true, as another skillful Scripture reader suggests, that “biblical exposition cannot be, in the context of the church, a scientific enterprise designed to recover the past . . . [but] . . . an artistic preoccupation that is designed to generate alternative futures,”<sup>1</sup> then what kind of future is generated by the way Dan Aleshire reads Scripture? *What kind of a world does his reading reveal?* Throughout his close to 30 years of serving and leading ATS, Dan Aleshire has allowed his reading of Scripture to form and inform the

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *A Pathway of Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), xx.

books, essays, public addresses, and graduation speeches he delivered across the ATS membership. This essay attempts to “read” Dan reading Scripture—to describe the world revealed through such a way of reading, and to identify some of the reading practices and preferences that make such a Scripture-shaped world come to life.

It may be said that Dan Aleshire’s reading of Scripture generates a **world that defies tribalism**. Scripture is never read in a vacuum, and all of Dan’s reading is placed consciously in the “big tent” of the ecclesial families of the ATS membership. Raised in a churchly context of language used often to encourage separation, Dan memorized “be ye therefore separate” (II Corinthians 6:17) at an early age. The path that led from the “piety of separatism”—in which Dan was first formed—to the executive leadership of what has been referred to as “the most ecumenical organization in North America” may not have been straight, but it has been sure. Rather than dissecting publicly what has made it possible for him to read and think differently from his early formation, he has said simply that his “formation in the piety of separation, in the end, did not take.”

In place of tribalism and separation, Dan returns repeatedly to diversity—the thing for which ATS may be most widely known—“a value that most member schools affirm as a life-giving, quality-enhancing reality to be embraced.”<sup>2</sup> He interprets diversity as a theological virtue and is informed by a reading of the Genesis 9 Babel narrative that sees diversity as both “fulfill[ing] the purposes of God for the human family and prohibit[ing] the human family from succumbing to pride.” This interpretation is shaped by attention to the multiplicity of languages with which the Spirit came at Pentecost and by the way in which the “integrity and wholeness of God is evident only in the persons of the Trinity—the one God in three persons.”<sup>3</sup> Racial/ethnic diversity and theological diversity are not optional in a world that rejects tribalism. They are necessary and crucial to the purposes of God.

Robustly rejecting sectarian interpretations, Dan’s reading of Scripture points to practices that contribute to theologically diverse communities. Practices that promote civility, that ensure the presence of all voices in discussion and decision making, that create a neutral space amid competing

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2 Daniel Aleshire, “Community and Diversity,” ATS Biennial Meeting, June 2012, 2.

3 Aleshire, “Gifts Differing: The Educational Value of Race and Ethnicity,” *Theological Education* 45, no. 1 (2009): 1–18.

advocacies, and that create space for the respectful knowing of others<sup>4</sup> are the logical outcomes of a reading that deems diversity a virtue. Dan recognizes the complexity of the long pew that is the ATS membership as well as the intricate realities within which any public reading and interpretation of Scripture in an ATS context occur. Such reading requires postures of modesty and humility, plus the twin convictions that neither can the ways of God be reduced to that which is obvious from a single vantage point, nor is there “only one faithful way to read.”<sup>5</sup> In a world that defies tribalism, the presence of all sorts of diversity is not an inconvenience to be suffered but a good to be celebrated and a posture to be learned.

“In a world that defies tribalism, the presence of all sorts of diversity is not an inconvenience to be suffered but a good to be celebrated and a posture to be learned. For the sake of a genuinely ecumenical membership of schools . . . Dan Aleshire’s reading of Scripture insists on the richness of theological diversity.”

For the sake of a genuinely ecumenical membership of schools—generously diverse in students, faculty, educational practices, and institutional structures—Dan Aleshire’s reading of Scripture insists on the richness of theological diversity.

**A world in which things are called by their right and truest names** is also being generated by the way in which Dan reads Scripture. “The function of Scripture may well be to call things by their right names in order that we may be in touch with the genuine reality in which God has called us to live.”<sup>6</sup> Sensitive to what Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann refers to as the “function of Scripture,” Dan has developed the gift of christening—of naming things in a way that brings to light that which is most essential, and most essentially Christian, in a practice or a person. Thus, educational assessment is understood as an act of stewardship “because

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4 Aleshire, “Community and Diversity,” 7–8.

5 Carolyn Sharp, *Wrestling the Word* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 2010), xv.

6 Brueggemann, *Pathway*, 8.

so much that is good is at stake.”<sup>7</sup> Learning is named “an act of discipleship,” and the process of redeveloping the ATS Standards and Procedures becomes “liturgical work.” Dan knows the “particular delights of finding words and speaking them into silences big enough to allow them to be heard,”<sup>8</sup> and he has done this hundreds of times at events for presidents and deans and development officers, at ATS Biennial Meetings and graduations and conferences, as well as in his published works. Dan believes that naming activities and things by their truest names matters, for “the heart of our faith is not wishful thinking. It is a hopeful honesty about human sinfulness and God’s goodness, about failure and redemption.”<sup>9</sup>

In addition, Dan’s way of reading Scripture births a **world that is built upon blessing and bends toward hope**. In a commencement address titled “The Blessing that Belongs to the Beginning,” Dan told graduates,

I don’t think you should leave this service with an ounce of fear. The God of Abraham and Sarah will go before you and make the impossible laughable. The God of Joseph and Mary will bless you and find a place for you to rest in the night. The God of Paul and Phoebe will guide you on the journey and show you how to serve in new places and in new ways.<sup>10</sup>

That this blessed world is resilient with an arc that bends toward hope is an enduring theme in Dan’s writing and public addresses. He is hopeful about the future of theological schools,

because theological schools are vessels with an incredible capacity to endure. We can be hopeful because institutions can change and discover ways to meet future needs. We can be hopeful because theological schools will continue to provide formational education, in terms of both Christian

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7 Aleshire, “The Character and Assessment of Learning for Religious Vocation: MDiv Education and Numbering the Levites,” *Theological Education* 39, no. 1 (2003): 1–14.

8 Marilyn McEntyre, *Caring for Words in a Culture of Lies* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 51.

9 Aleshire, “Go to the Hand That God Will Show You,” 2010 ATS Presidential Leadership Intensive Conference, 4.

10 Aleshire, “The Blessing that Belongs to the Beginning,” commencement address at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University, 2013.

identity and ministerial leadership . . . we can be hopeful because schools will find the varied and variegated educational forms that the future will need.<sup>11</sup>

Aleshire is convinced that “grace will do its work in human lives no matter how poorly congregations do theirs.”<sup>12</sup> This conviction is what makes it possible to proclaim that, “What I can tell you is that the God who was is the God who will be, and that the God who has kept you to this very hour will be the God who will keep you in every hour of the future.”<sup>13</sup> Such hope is essential to the Christian endeavor, for “if the church survives, but has forgotten the reason for the hope that lives within it, survival won’t mean much.”<sup>14</sup>

Through Dan’s reading of Scripture, the possibility of a more generous, christened, and hopeful world is being generated. But how does such a picture become possible? How does such an outcome occur? What sorts of strategies or sensibilities does Dan bring to his reading of Scripture to create the image of such a spacious, truly-named, and resilient world?

First, Dan draws deeply on biblical and theological vocabulary and themes. He looks for imprints and listens for echoes of biblical themes throughout the world of theological education, then constructs meaning out of what he sees and hears. In addressing the discomfort of many schools with the expectations of educational assessment, Dan draws on the biblically familiar by turning to the prohibition against counting the Levites located in the book of Numbers. Surprisingly, though, he chooses the familiar in order to turn it on its head, stating that he “does not think that the Levites should get an exemption . . . their work is every bit as crucial as the work of any surgeon, any engineer, or any pilot.”<sup>15</sup> Drawing on New Testament vocabulary on another occasion, Dan writes, “Unlike the narrow way the Gospels talk about, the road that leads to good

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11 Aleshire, “Making Haste Slowly: Celebrating the Future of Theological Schools,” *Theological Education* 44, no. 1 (2008): 8.

12 Daniel O. Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections of the Work and Future of Theological Schools* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 2.

13 Aleshire, “Ministry in a Post-Modern and Pre-Future Age,” commencement address at Campbell University Divinity School, 2013.

14 Aleshire, “Making Haste Slowly,” 3.

15 Aleshire, “Character and Assessment,” 7.

assessment is a wide one . . . Good assessment uses many indicators in many ways to arrive at nuanced judgments about educational effects.”<sup>16</sup>

In speaking to the Board of Directors of the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation following the 2012 Newtown, Connecticut, school shooting, Dan framed what was on everyone’s mind in the context of ancient sorrow familiar to all who know Scripture.

At some point, anyone who has ever harbored a belief that God is both loving and powerful asks the question, “Why this kind of violence? Where is God? Why didn’t God intervene? These are Job’s questions; they are the questions of Rachel weeping for her children; they are the questions of people in any age who dare to believe.”<sup>17</sup>

In a 2015 church presentation, Dan turned to the meaning of “the Day of the Lord” (Acts 2).

The Day of the Lord may not make everything wonderful, but it makes the worst of tragedies bearable. It may not prevent human wounds, but it provides the balm those wounds require. It may not wipe sin off the face of the earth, but it lessens its grip, forgives its trespasses, and restores its destruction.<sup>18</sup>

In so doing, he demonstrated not only an abiding orientation toward Scripture but also the experienced orator’s rhythm of three: a) not that, but this; b) not that, but this; c) not that, but this, this, this.

Whether turning to the early church’s experience of Pentecost at the anniversary of a school’s Chinese Ministry program, or contrasting *kairos* and *chronos* time to illuminate changes in theological education, or returning more than once to the irreplaceable role of grace in “nurturing the gifts

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16 Ibid., 9.

17 Aleshire, “A Terrible Time and a Tender Ministry: Religion in an American Community,” presentation at the Board of Directors’ meeting of the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, February 2013, 3.

18 Aleshire, “Dreams and Visions, Last and First,” presentation at Shadyside Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, March 2015, 4.

of diversity into full bloom,<sup>19</sup> it is easy to see in the ways in which Dan reads Scripture a world and an imagination that are Scripture-soaked.

Second, Dan is alert to the power of metaphor, particularly, but not only, biblical metaphor. Theologian Sallie McFague defines a metaphor as

a word or phrase used inappropriately. It belongs properly in one context but is being used in another . . . what a metaphor expresses cannot be said directly or apart from it, for if it could be, one would have said it directly. Here, metaphor is a strategy of desperation, not decoration; it is an attempt to speak about what we do not know in terms of what we do know.<sup>20</sup>

If this definition holds true, then Dan is a desperate man, for metaphors are a strategy he regularly employs.

In his first year as an assistant professor, Dan landed on the image of the “earthen vessel” of II Corinthians as definitive of the nature of ministry and, “from that sermon forward, the image of ‘earthen vessels’ has been part of [his] association with theological schools.”<sup>21</sup> This metaphor has been a favorite of Dan’s and one that has offered much through him to the world of theological education. An earthen vessel has instrumental value, not terminal value.<sup>22</sup> It is both durable and fragile, and demonstrates nimbleness in its ability to hold both new wine and old.<sup>23</sup> The metaphor tells us more about theological education than we could know through direct speech.

Dan employs other biblical metaphors, also. Like the purpose of salt which is to be “good for *something*,” so are theological schools to find their purpose beyond their own existence.<sup>24</sup> Like the presence of wind as a metaphor for God’s presence, readers of Dan’s book, *Earthen Vessels*, are reminded that, while neither the origin nor destination of God’s presence is revealed, the movement of God’s presence can be felt and its ways are

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19 Aleshire, “Community and Diversity,” 9.

20 David, B. Lott, ed., *Sallie McFague: Collected Readings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 86–87.

21 Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels*, x.

22 *Ibid.*, 165.

23 Aleshire, “Making Haste Slowly,” 6.

24 Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels*, 164.

mysterious.”<sup>25</sup> And, in one of the many illustrations of which this way of reading Scripture bends always toward hope, “The God of ages past is the God of ages to come. The wind will blow.”<sup>26</sup>

Not every metaphor is acceptable, however, and Dan takes issue with the notion of education as that which produces a “product.” Product is an industrial term, and “thinking about education as a product changes educational thinking.”<sup>27</sup> George Orwell’s insight, quoted by Marilyn McEntyre, that “the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts”<sup>28</sup> seems to be one to which Dan ascribes.

If the reading and exposition of Scripture are indeed for the purpose of generating new worlds, then metaphor is a particularly apt rhetorical device for, as Old Testament scholar Carolyn Sharp states, “metaphors help to speak new imaginative worlds into being. They not only name things ‘as they are’; they also invite the reader to perceive the intimate connections between unlike things and the dissimilarities that keep those things from being, in fact, identical.”<sup>29</sup> Theological schools are **not** clay pots, but thinking about them as such reminds the thinker that they are to be *for* something, and not simply an end in themselves. Likewise, differences in atmospheric pressure are not the same as the activity of the Divine, but they are both a wonder, and the eternal presence of the one reminds one of the sure and hopeful activity of the Other.

Third, Dan insists on a reading of Scripture that stands firmly in the line of the Christian tradition as “a teaching tradition.” “Christian faith is not just about the problems of parishes and congregations at a given point in time. It is about an understanding of faithfulness and hope that emerges from thousands of years of study and research. Good intellectual work may be an important way in which the Spirit speaks afresh to guide this and future ages.”<sup>30</sup>

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25 Ibid., 172.

26 Aleshire, “Making Haste Slowly,” 9.

27 Aleshire, “Character and Assessment,” 3.

28 McEntyre, *Caring for Words*, 4.

29 Sharp, *Wrestling*, 27.

30 Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels*, 171–172.



Further,

the Christian tradition has a strong intellectual element. From the complex theological arguments in the book of Romans, to Martin Luther's intellectually rigorous commentary about Romans, to the scholarly effort necessary to translate a difficult text like Romans, intellectual work exercises a gift of God to inform and advance the faith . . . Intellectual work is a friend of faith and stokes fires of commitment.<sup>31</sup>

Scripture reading is neither a half-hearted enterprise nor a mushy exercise. The stakes are high, requiring a keen intellect, a rigorous diligence, and an open heart. "Theological schools are called to teach the tradition. Jesus was a rabbi—teacher—and his ministry has been followed by faithful persons who are teachers of the church."<sup>32</sup> Scripture is to be read in ways that are intellectually responsible.

Fourth, Dan holds to a reading of Scripture that is grounded in the life of the church and infused with pastoral imagination. The intellectual work and teaching are always for the purposes of the church and the multiple ways in which ministry takes place in the world. "Learning for ministry results in knowing texts, traditions, and practices of the community of faith, and knowing them deeply enough that learners are formed by what they know."<sup>33</sup> Formation for vocation and the training of leaders for ministry take place in the context of encountering God through texts and are directed toward a deeply human, formational *telos*. "The goal of theological learning is not the accrual of ever greater amounts of religious knowledge; it is the transformation of learners into different kinds of Christian believers."<sup>34</sup>

Dan reads in ways that are both pastoral and deeply principled, and the principles arise precisely from the primary text he has been reading all these years. "Missional leaders believe that the Gospel really matters . . . lead because they are passionately committed to the task, and their

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31 Ibid., 15.

32 Aleshire, "Making Haste Slowly," 7.

33 Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels*, 170.

34 Ibid., 35.

internal compass is oriented to the love, grace, justice, and healing that compose the true North of the Christian faith."<sup>35</sup>

The pastoral imagination that infuses the ways in which Dan reads Scripture is most vibrant in relation to what it means to be part of the human experience. At an installation service in a Presbyterian church, Dan said,

The best in us and the worst in us are deeply interwoven . . . We are faithful one moment and faithless the next . . . It is the same with congregations. They are houses of faith and homes for hypocrites. They can be heroically faithful to one part of the Gospel and helplessly resistant to another part . . . it is this very reality that creates a home for ministry . . . Life for all of us, however, is this concoction of good and evil, incredible joy and unspeakable sadness, heroic faith and persistent sin. And that is why we need a pastor.<sup>36</sup>

In Dan's reflection on the Connecticut school shooting, he wrote,

Newtown residents do not know how much these pastors have read or studied; all they know is that these pastors knew when silence was ministry, when presence was ministry, when action was ministry, when liturgy was ministry, and when public witness was ministry. There is a correlation between effective and theologically articulate ministry and theological education.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, this alternate, spacious, christened world emerges, at least in part, because Dan is willing to *be read* by the text he reads. In a manner that is simultaneously analytical and personal, Dan is willing to read his own story as closely as he reads the holy text. Lutheran Scripture scholar James W. Voelz wrote that "when a given text is read, simultaneously another text is also read, namely, the reader, or, perhaps better yet, the life-experience of the reader of the text."<sup>38</sup> Dan is willing to read himself for the sake of others, and remembers his way into pieces of his personal history for the sake of a larger and shared future. As the Coptic fathers touched the cross

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35 Aleshire, "Ministry in a Post-Modern . . . Age," 3.

36 Aleshire, "Dreams and Visions," 3.

37 Aleshire, "A Terrible Time," 5.

38 James W. Voelz, "Multiple Signs, Levels of Meaning and Self as Text: Elements of Intertextuality," *Semeia* 69–70 (1995): 149–64, as cited in Sharp, *Wrestling the Word*, 5.

“as a way of relocating and grounding themselves in spiritual reality,”<sup>39</sup> he has returned many times to “touch” the stories that have formed him.

Dan’s reading is rooted in the early gift of a Scofield Reference Bible from his parents that contains, inscribed in his father’s hand, the biblical exhortation to “study to show thyself approved unto God.” This exhortation, and the Scriptures from which it was drawn, set the course for much that unfolded over the years. All who have heard Dan speak know something of the way in which experiences from his childhood home and adolescent years, and his life with his wife, Jo Ellen, and their children, Jennie and Jonathan, have “located” him in relation to God, to grace, and to the world. Those in the ATS world have witnessed his willingness to mine the stories of his life in relation to the Scripture he reads. Perhaps this is because he understands, as Frederick Buechner expresses, that this is pretty much the only way in which Scripture can be truthfully read.

“What I began to see was that the Bible is not essentially, as I had always more or less supposed, a book of ethical principles, of moral exhortations, of cautionary tales about exemplary people, of uplifting thoughts . . . I saw it instead as a great, tattered compendium of writings, the underlying and unifying purpose of all of which is to show how God works through the Jacobs and Jabboks of history to make himself known to the world and to draw the world back to himself.”<sup>40</sup>

Through a deep familiarity with the vocabulary and metaphors of the biblical text, an abiding commitment to Christianity as a teaching tradition and its locus within the life of the church, and the courageous willingness to allow himself to “be read” by the Scriptures that inform both his imagination and his vocation, Dan Aleshire has read the Bible in the context of The Association of Theological Schools. Through this reading, he has painted and proclaimed the picture of a world that is generous, not sectarian, a world in which things are “care-fully” and truly-named, and, always, a world that is shot through with hopefulness.

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39 McEntyre, *Caring for Words*, 116.

40 Frederick Buechner, *Now and Then* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 21.



# First Impressions of a Lasting Legacy: The *Aleshire Effect* in Abbreviated Retrospective

*Christopher The*  
*The Association of Theological Schools*

*ABSTRACT: My first months with The Association of Theological Schools happened to be Dan Aleshire's final season as executive director. In this brief article, I hope to convey something of the joy it was to learn from him, over the mere course of several months, that the role of the Association and the ATS Commission on Accrediting is the theological act of demonstrating presence amid the spaces implicated by and impinging upon the shared endeavor called theological education. In the (few) pages to follow, I make use of a phrase—the Aleshire effect—a term of endearment that becomes more and more defined as we go.*

My first half-year with The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) happened to be Dan Aleshire's last. During the months of spring 2017, I had the privilege of working with Dan as we served alongside the rest of a team that he so carefully curated.<sup>1</sup> There is a certain privilege in being invited to plunge midstream into a conversation that churns and rolls with decades of tributary thought, as there also is honor in being summoned to share in the work of navigating some truly tectonic shifts in landscape.

It seems to me that the thrill of rushing toward some open ocean might best be enjoyed under the guidance of a trustworthy captain and crew. The *Aleshire effect* conveys, I hope, in part, a kind of serene confidence in knowing that at least one wise person has thought about theological education likely more than you have, and that at least one tireless individual has walked its winding paths—alongside a host of organizations, educators, administrators, and students—for decades prior. Yet, beyond this confidence in the wisdom and experience of others, I hope also to demonstrate

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<sup>1</sup> I share with my colleague, Mary Young, director, leadership education, the distinction of being the last of ATS staff Dan Aleshire brought onboard to serve the Association and its various publics.

that the same *Aleshire effect* invites one's own participation, conveying the empowering notion that everyone has contributions to make, for theological education truly to be *theological*.<sup>2</sup>

## On being there

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*Leadership is . . . a function of communities that need leaders to help them do the job they are called to do. Leadership is about empowering and guiding the community to fulfill its calling.*

- Dan Aleshire<sup>3</sup>

If your eyes are like mine, they are drawn to bookshelves where titles, texts, and trinkets are on display. I find myself wondering what such collections convey about their curators—whether they and I might have authors and interests in common, as well as what items we *ought* to share that might be embarrassingly absent from my own bookshelves. A decade ago while on staff at my seminary, I recall on a particular shelf in my supervisor's office a name I did not yet know, whose impact I would later learn to be pivotal to theological higher education in recent decades. In a grace perhaps prevenient, Dan's wisdom was there.

Accompanying Dan's name on that shelf were, I would discover, the works of several of his peers from different continents. If I had to judge those books from their covers, or at least from their titles and subtitles, it would have seemed to me that the lot of them were all hoping to push the enterprise toward (1) more robust theological understandings of the work we share, as well as (2) ever-increasingly faithful matrices where the crucial notions of *formation*, *integrity*, and *vocation* would flourish amid a gamut of changes.

The *Aleshire effect* was present, albeit invisibly so to me at the time, in the myriad ways my supervisor engaged reflectively and intentionally the field of theological higher education. All the while I was receiving a seminary education, I was also learning about the seminary-as-enterprise.

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2 I recall in spring 2017 Dan asking repeatedly, provocatively, the same question posed by Richard J. Mouw, "What's Theological about Theological Education?" in *Theological Education* 49, no. 1 (2014): 1–8.

3 Daniel O. Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 47.

## What centers our work

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*Cooperation . . . can only be achieved through communication. Dialogue, as essential communication, must underlie any cooperation. . . . Dialogue does not impose, does not manipulate, does not domesticate, does not “sloganize.”*

- Paulo Freire<sup>4</sup>

On occasion of the Association’s novocennial in 2008, Glenn T. Miller wrote a brief history of The [American] Association of Theological Schools. In that work, he mentions his initial plan to organize his retrospective sketch around the executive directorship—until he discovered that “the real actors in the history of AATS/ATS were the schools that made up the larger body and their response to their own sense of need and status. AATS/ATS was an agent of change for the schools, and the schools in turn changed the Association. Even after ninety years, it remains a fascinating story”—an appraisal that still holds true in the event of the Association’s upcoming centennial.<sup>5</sup> Here, the *Aleshire effect* signals an incisive deference to member schools vis-à-vis the shared enterprise of theological education: the Association, no less than the ATS Commission on Accrediting, is inconceivable apart from the schools that constitute and animate these two corporations in service of their member schools.

Thanks to Dan’s influence, a number of us have come to understand the roles of the Association and the Commission to be attending a calling, one that demonstrates *presence* amid the spaces implicated by and impinging upon the endeavor known as theological education. In Dan’s words, the Association is a gathering of *faithful stewards*: “‘Faithful’ reminds us that the mission is clear and in many ways unchanged”—yet “[a]s the forms and practices that implement that mission have changed and continued to change, ‘stewards’ discern old practices to sustain, current practices to

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4 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York & London: Continuum, 2005), 168.

5 Glenn T. Miller, *A Community of Conversation: A Retrospective of The Association of Theological Schools and Ninety Years of North American Theological Education* (Pittsburgh: The Association of Theological Schools, 2008), 38.

abandon, and new practices to adopt.”<sup>6</sup> Faithful stewardship looks ahead to the future, expectantly and excitedly.

## On the horizon

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*Make haste slowly. Festina lente. It is time to do what good schools have always done, only better. It is time for good schools to do things they have never done before. The water is changing into wine before our eyes. We work with vessels that can hold both. The future is calling.*

- Dan Aleshire<sup>7</sup>

For pilgrims peripatetic and pious, the horizon line is both a welcome reality and an unforgiving reminder that their journey continues. It is welcome, insofar as the future has not been foreclosed. The words in the above epigraph may have been penned last decade, yet the wisdom underwriting the call is still sound: *It is time to do what good schools have always done, only better.* The future indeed calls, as it makes demands upon weary migrants. As Dan put it, “The future will belong to the schools that have the ability to use the resources they have in hand and to identify new resources of many kinds.”<sup>8</sup> As communities of faith, may we pray for daily bread to attend us along the way.

Glints of Dan’s legacy are reflected in the trajectories that he forwarded with passionate sincerity and convicted civility. Given the wide range of contexts and settings, of traditions and practices, and of ecclesial confessions and institutional missions represented by the Association’s broad constituencies, I imagine the prospect of speaking as ATS executive director to be a terribly weighty thing—no less weighty a theological act than maintaining a posture of engaged silence whenever unity, understanding, and partnership are exceedingly valued. On some occasions, I observed Dan give voice to advocacy, urgently prodding partners amid

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6 Daniel O. Aleshire, “Message from the Executive Director,” in *ATS 50th Biennial Meeting: Missions and Models: The Changing Forms of Theological Education* (conference proceedings), 2016 June 28–30 in St. Louis, MO, 14.

7 Daniel O. Aleshire, “Making Haste Slowly: Celebrating the Future Theological Schools,” in *Theological Education* 44, no. 1 (2008): 9.

8 Daniel O. Aleshire, “Message from the Executive Director,” in *ATS 49th Biennial Meeting: Resourcing Theological Education* (conference proceedings), 2014 June 25–27 in Pittsburgh, PA, 15.



potential controversies; at other times, I witnessed Dan patiently listening, engaged and silent, all the while demonstrating solidarity without words. The *Aleshire effect* points to this capacity for holding together the discourse itself, in view of the public good on offer by such a *community of conversation*.<sup>9</sup> “In many ways,” according to Dan, “ATS is a visible test case about community existing among significant—even profound—religious differences.”<sup>10</sup> That there is no confessional or theological agreement across the Association’s member schools—I would argue—points to an allure, a gravity exerted by the ability to hold and sustain this kind of conversation; this reality may, in and of itself, be *theological*.

Retirement from the ATS executive directorship has by no means meant Dan’s retreat from the sphere of theological education. My most recent run-in with Dan found him at the Greater Pittsburgh International Airport, between personal visits consulting with two different member schools. From my own abbreviated retrospective, I have learned that the run-in is just Dan being Dan, tirelessly living for the good work we share together—with and without ATS—across multiple, varied, and deeply important intersections of faith and public life. One way of understanding the Association is as a gathering of varied and gifted learning communities—yet merely one kind (viz. the “theological school”) amid the diversities of life-to-be-lived by people of the living God. “Learning takes place at the intersections of [various] learning communities, as experiences, stories, concepts, questions, and actions emerge,” writes Norma Cook Everist. “People sometimes set one learning community against another: urban against rural; family against school; seminary against ‘real world,’ as though any setting and its peoples’ lives at that time were not

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9 Miller, 2008. Regarding the Association’s importance for Roman Catholic seminaries, Sr. Katarina Schuth opines that ATS membership “has provided excellent support for the distinctive needs of Catholic theologates while making available to other denominations the wisdom of their Catholic counterparts in the areas of human and spiritual formation,” in Katarina Schuth, *Seminary Formation: Recent History—Current Circumstances—New Directions* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2016), 5.

10 Daniel O. Aleshire, “Message from the Executive Director,” in *ATS 48th Biennial Meeting: Celebrating Community* (conference proceedings), 2012 June 20–22 in Minneapolis, MN, 13.

‘real.’ If one learning community begins to dominate or needs to assert its independence from another, creative intersections are lost.”<sup>11</sup>

The enterprise we call theological education—this joint venture, these covenants, our interweaving of stories, practices, and proclamations—has certainly come a long way. While the preparation of ministers has had millennia of precedent and myriad methods, the notion of the theological school as we recognize the term today—even during this centennial year of the Association—finds its institutional roots in the complex (no less contested, often confrontational) process of reform across religious expressions and ecclesial denominations. Writing of the experience in Western Christianity, Justo González recounts that the Council of Trent (1545–1563) “ordered [among other reforms] the founding of seminaries for the training of the ministry (until that time, there had been no generally accepted regulations or education requirements for ordination).”<sup>12</sup> Yet Dan would surely remind us that there is still quite a long way to go. The Aleshire effect draws (perhaps subtle) attention to the presence of at least one indefatigable companion for this journey, even in the uncertain years ahead. Indeed, we in theological education find ourselves accompanied by more than only Dan: we continue to be blessed by many who leave lasting legacies that, with the Lord’s help, might enable and empower faithful innovations. The future, indeed, is calling.

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11 Norma Cook Everist, *The Church As Learning Community: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 80.

12 Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 2 (New York: HarperCollins, 1985), 120.

# Accreditation



# Accreditation Standards: A Look Back and a Look Around

*Tom Tanner*

*The Association of Theological Schools*

*ABSTRACT: As the ATS Commission membership contemplates another major redevelopment of the Standards (a quarter century since the last one), Tom Tanner, Commission staff liaison to the proposed redevelopment process, presents a double look at our Standards: (1) a look back at where we've been over the last 80 years since the first Standards were implemented in 1938, and (2) a look around at the current state of accrediting standards (both ours and others), to see where that might lead us as we look to the future.*

**A**mong the many monikers given to Dan Aleshire during his 27 years at The Association of Theological Schools (ATS), the title of “accreditor in chief” may be one of the most fitting. For a quarter century, no one knew ATS accreditation or the accrediting standards better than he. In fact, he was hired in 1990 to oversee *all* of ATS accrediting and for his first four years at ATS was the *only* ATS staff member doing that work—a role now handled by five ATS directors. As the sole accrediting staff member, it was not uncommon for him in those days to do three accreditation visits a week! He would assist one accrediting team in getting started on Sunday, support another team on Monday or Tuesday, help yet a third team finish on Wednesday or Thursday, and then do it all again at three different schools the next week. And undergirding all his hard work in accreditation were the ATS Commission Standards of Accreditation.

It is not surprising, then, that *Dan Aleshire once said that June 23, 1996, was his very best day at ATS*—and he had nearly 9,900 days at ATS. That was the day the ATS Commission membership voted almost unanimously (two schools abstained) to approve a completely redeveloped set of Standards of Accreditation, which remain mostly intact to this day. That day in Denver was the culmination of an intense, four-year project that was led by him and represented the first major redevelopment of the Standards in nearly a quarter century, since their last major revision in 1972. The vote was so overwhelming (not only numerically, but also emotionally) that after the final count was announced, the 330-some members in that

ballroom rose to their feet and sang the Doxology in unison. That's a good day in accrediting.

As the ATS Commission contemplates another major redevelopment of the Standards in the next few years (a quarter century later), it seems fitting to take a double look: (1) *a look back* at where we've been over the last 80-plus-year history of our Standards, and (2) *a look around* at the current state of accrediting standards (both ours and others), especially to see where that might lead our membership in the future. This article will spend the most time looking back, which seems fitting for an association that will celebrate its 100th anniversary in June 2018—and fittingly, back in Denver. We hope it is another good day in accrediting.

## **A look back: A brief history of the ATS Commission Standards of Accreditation**

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### **The early years (1918–1938)**

In August 1918, 101 delegates from 50-some schools met at Harvard University for the first Conference of Theological Seminaries and Colleges in the United States and Canada to “consider the problems of theological education, especially as affected by the war . . . ”<sup>1</sup> The delegates at that very first conference [later ATS] “recognize[d] that after the war there will be many men [sic] looking to the Ministry whose experience in the National Service will have given them great advantages of training and character” and concluded that “great care should be exercised in maintaining a high standard of qualifications for the Ministry . . . in view of the many common problems confronting all seminaries, such as the decrease in the number of candidates . . . ”<sup>2</sup> Some things never change.

For its first 16 years, the Conference met primarily “to promote intercourse amongst the institutions which compose its membership,” including ways “to advance the highest ideals of training for the Christian Ministry.”<sup>3</sup> That focus on “the highest ideals” became the subject of some debate among ATS schools in the 1920s, especially following the 1924

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1 1918 *ATS Bulletin* 1, 11.

2 *Ibid.*, 12.

3 1921 *ATS Bulletin* 2, 2.

publication of Robert Kelly's *Theological Education: A Study of 161 Theological Schools in the United States and Canada*. That classic study was modeled on Abraham Flexner's pioneering study in 1910, *Medical Education in the United States*, which called for stricter standards for training physicians. As Glenn Miller reports in his 2008 history of ATS, many ATS presidents were not pleased with Kelly's conclusions in 1924 that "there were too many theological schools, operating with too low standards and too few resources."<sup>4</sup> Consequently, a study was commissioned in 1929 that many ATS presidents hoped might soften Kelly's conclusions. That study, funded by John D. Rockefeller Jr., resulted in William Brown and Mark May's four-volume magnum opus, *The Education of American Ministers*. "In exchange for funding the study, Rockefeller's staff insisted [however] that the Conference [ATS] become an accrediting agency [because] something had to be done to improve seminary standards."<sup>5</sup>

In July 1934, shortly after Brown and May's work was published, the ATS delegates voted "that a commission on Accrediting Institutions of Theological Education be appointed [to recommend] standards or criteria by which it would be proposed to rate institutions."<sup>6</sup> To expand a voluntary conference of conversation partners into an accrediting agency was a fairly radical idea at the time—during the Depression. After all, in the 1930s "accreditation was a relatively new idea" and "designed for colleges and universities," not seminaries, as Miller points out.<sup>7</sup> It would be another 30 years before the large regional accreditors began admitting seminaries in the 1960s.

Two years later, in June 1936 at the Association's tenth Biennial Meeting, the very first ATS accrediting Standards were published.<sup>8</sup> The Standards were prefaced with two important statements that have helped define the Association's philosophy of accreditation ever since: (1) "the Association does not treat its standards as definite rules and specifications to be applied in an exact and mechanical fashion," and (2) "there is no desire

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4 Glenn Miller, *A Community of Conversation: A Retrospective of [ATS] and Ninety Years of North American Theological Education* (Pittsburgh: The Association of Theological Schools, 2008), 4.

5 Ibid.

6 1934 *ATS Bulletin* 9, 16.

7 Miller, 5.

8 1936 *ATS Bulletin* 11, 42–43.

to enforce these standards in an arbitrary fashion [but] are to be administered by the Commission on Accrediting Institutions by way of stimulus and encouragement.”<sup>9</sup> The Commission consisted of the four officers of the Association, plus six others appointed by the Executive Committee, which consisted of the officers and six others elected by the membership.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the initial Standards never mentioned the words *evaluation* or *assessment*—two areas of critical importance today, that did not appear in ATS Standards until 1972 and 1996, respectively, with the 2012 revision especially highlighting assessment. Yet, the focus on student outcomes was clear from the very beginning, as made clear in this opening statement to the 1936 Standards:

[ATS] regards as the chief ground for the inclusion of an institution in the list [of accredited schools] evidence that the institution is effective in preparing students for a successful ministry. It believes that this evidence is most plainly to be found in the extent to which graduates of these institutions do in actual practice render a successful ministry.<sup>11</sup>

However, the Commission confessed that “such evidence in itself alone is, in the first place, difficult to secure, and in the second place, difficult to interpret satisfactorily.”<sup>12</sup> Consequently, the Commission relied instead on “certain factors in the life and work of particular institutions”<sup>13</sup> such as faculty resources, library resources, and financial resources—all focused on inputs rather than outcomes.

The initial nine Standards in 1936 were only two pages long (compared to today’s 19 Standards covering 98 pages). The first standard on “Standards of Admission” was only one sentence, requiring “for admission . . . the degree of A.B.” The last standard on “Inspection” said only institutions “inspected and approved by the Commission shall be accredited.” The longest standard was the fourth one on faculty, “which should include at least four full-time professors” in biblical, historical, theological,

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9 Ibid., 41.

10 Ibid., 39 and 41.

11 Ibid., 41.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.



and practical areas. The only degree program recognized was the “B.D. or its equivalent,” which was not renamed the MDiv until the first major revision in 1972. Perhaps the most interesting standard was the eighth one on “General Tone,” which required that in accrediting an institution “regard should be had for the quality of its instruction, the standing of its professors, the character of its administration [though a standard on administration did not appear until 1962], the efficiency of its offices of record, and its proved ability to prepare students for efficient professional service or further scholarly pursuits.”<sup>14</sup> The emphasis on “efficient professional service” grew out of Brown and May’s 1934 work, which Miller describes this way: “. . . much of the work’s power came from its definition of theological education as professional education. Ministers were trained to do a job, and the churches that hired them had a right to expect their employees to be competent and efficient.”<sup>15</sup>

In 1938, the ATS Commission on Accrediting issued its very first report.<sup>16</sup> That report described the “procedure in accrediting,” which relied on schools completing 18 “schedules” (the precursor to today’s ATS Annual Report Forms). If those submissions were deemed satisfactory, then a single member of the Commission visited the school for a one-day inspection.<sup>17</sup> The “inspector” then “checked” off on a list whether the school did or did not meet each standard. The Commission used that checklist, along with the inspector’s report and the school’s schedules, to make an accreditation decision. In 1938, 61 of 79 ATS members applied for accreditation, which was granted to 46 of them (75%). Of the 15 schools denied accreditation, 12 were judged to have too few faculty.<sup>18</sup> Among the 46 schools granted accreditation, 35 (76%) were accredited with a “notation,” which was “a way of referring to footnotes appended to the list of accredited schools . . . to indicate that while a school is being accredited, it does not yet adequately safeguard [certain] standards.”<sup>19</sup> Among the 22 possible notations, the first three were the most common (imposed on 26

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14 1936 *ATS Bulletin* 11, 43.

15 Miller, 5.

16 1938 *ATS Bulletin* 12.

17 *Ibid.*, 7–8.

18 *Ibid.*, 9.

19 *Ibid.*, 13.

schools), all of which dealt with the percentage of seminarians without a baccalaureate degree, which ranged from 10–24% (Notation 1) to 50–74% (Notation 3). The total enrollment of those 46 charter members of the Commission was 5,102, with a median of 90 students (compared to today's total of 73,400 students and a median of 140 for 270 ATS members).

### **The middle years (1939–1995)**

The original set of nine Standards from 1936 stayed fairly intact until 1946, when a new standard was added for “Theological Degrees beyond the B.D.” Until then, the BD (which became the MDiv in 1972) was the only degree approved by the ATS Commission. To be sure, 1936's Standard 2 on the “Length of Course and Standards for Graduation” mentioned the PhD and MA degrees, but it stipulated that they could only be offered by seminaries affiliated with a university with “the degree to be given by the university,” not the seminary. The shift in 1946 brought these academic degrees under the purview of the ATS Commission, though a new notation was added for schools that conferred the PhD degree that were “not an integral part of a university.”<sup>20</sup> The next significant revision came in 1954, when the library standard was expanded from one sentence to three pages. The expansion of the library standard, no doubt, was due to the founding of the American Theological Library Association in 1946, virtually all of whose members at the time were from ATS schools.

One of the most profound changes in accreditation came in 1956, though not in the Standards themselves. It was the first year that the Commission began to replace its one-and-done accreditation process (i.e., a one-time, one-day, one-person “inspection” based on questionnaires or “schedules” completed by applicant schools) with a regular, decennial review process. That ongoing process required an institution-wide self-study report at least every 10 years, which was reviewed by a committee of peer evaluators who visited the campus for several days. Begun in 1956, this new review process was not fully implemented until the mid-1960s. It was the combination of these two requirements (self-study reports and peer evaluators) that heralded a new era in accreditation for ATS. In his 2008 history of ATS, Glenn Miller describes quite well the profound implications of these two new requirements:

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20 1946 *ATS Bulletin* 16, 18.

For the first time, broad cross sections of the schools were involved in reaching conclusions about the state of the institution and its future. In time, of course, trustees and other publics would become involved as well. If one of the goals of accreditation was to set a standard for what would later be called a 'good theological school,' then more people were aware of what might constitute such an institution. *In effect, the self-study process created, both in theory and often in practice, a community of improvement.* As the standards progressively developed, the existence of this community supported each subsequent attempt to improve the educational quality of the seminaries. The other effect of the self-study process was the creation of a broader and better-networked community of theological educators. *As the visiting teams crossed the continent, they learned much about the problems and opportunities of other theological institutions.* This increased the awareness of common problems and raised the possibility that they might have common solutions . . . As the Association came to include evangelical, Catholic, and orthodox schools, *the self-study process [with peer review] was an invaluable way of providing exchanges of perspective across confessional boundaries.*<sup>21</sup>

The next revision of the Standards came in 1962 with a new standard on "Administration and Controls," the first ever to focus on administration and governance. The 1962 revision also added a standard on "Student Life and Work," the first to focus on students. A revision in 1966 saw the first reference to the MDiv, though MDiv did not become the official nomenclature until 1972, replacing the BD. In 1966, the first Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic seminaries were admitted to the Association, Maryknoll Seminary and St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary. In 1968, Maryknoll was the first Roman Catholic seminary to become accredited, the same year that 15 more Roman Catholic seminaries entered as Associate Members. In 1968, guidelines for the new Doctor of Ministry degree were appended to the Standards, but they were not officially added as a standard until 1972. In 1970, the Association first allowed Jewish schools to join, with references to the church and synagogue in the 1972 revision discussed below. So few joined (only one — Hebrew Union of Cincinnati — and

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21 Miller, 14, emphases added.

only as an Associate member from 1970 to 1979) that references to synagogue were omitted in the 1996 revision.

The first major redevelopment of the Standards came in 1972—36 years after their first publication. The “Preamble” to the Standards made it clear that this revision was focused on resources, a term used eight times on one page. Yet, resources did not necessarily come with “bright-line” minimums. For example, the standard on faculty removed for the first time a minimum number, which had increased from the initial four in 1936 to six in 1958. The 1972 revision represented quite a number of firsts, including the first references to women, to race and ethnicity, to institution-wide evaluation, to placement (called employment), and to officially prescribed nomenclatures for degree programs, including the first references to the MDiv, the DMin, the EdD, and the MRE. In fact, the new standard on the MRE was the first for what we now call a professional MA degree. Until then, only the MDiv was approved for professional ministry. The standard on students moved from sixth on the list to first on the list (it moved back down to seventh in the 1996 revision). The 1972 revision also introduced the use of “General Institutional Standards,” followed by degree program standards—a two-part structure that stayed until 2012, when the Commission added a third tier, the Educational Standard.

Six fairly minor revisions came between 1972 and 1996, beginning in 1982. In that year, the Preamble added a focus on mission to the 1972 focus on resources; mission (purpose) did not become a standard until two years later in 1984. The 1982 revision also added standards on “Responsiveness to Minority and Women’s Concerns” and on “Educational Programs Conducted Off-Campus.” The latter represented the first time in its nearly 50-year history that the Commission approved any educational offerings outside a school’s main campus. Thirty-five years later, nearly 100 ATS schools now have more than 300 extension sites, including 100 sites offering a complete degree and 50 sites offering at least half of a degree. Some things do change. In the 1984 revision, the focus on mission was heightened with a new standard on “Institutional Purpose,” placed first in the list. A tenth standard was added on “Institutional Policies Regarding Placement.” The MDiv standard also introduced for the first time four content areas; those were different, however, from the current four areas ecognized beginning in 1996.

The 1986 revision included a standard on the Doctor of Missiology degree for the first time, as well as one on the specialized professional MA

(MA in \_\_\_\_). The 1990 revision introduced a new standard on “Globalization of Theological Education.” In 1992, the Commission expanded its 1982 standard on off-campus programs to “Criteria for Extension and Distance Learning Programs,” though the latter term referred to audiovisual materials, not to online learning. A standard on online education did not come until 2000. The last revision before the major redevelopment in 1996 (see next section) was in 1994, when a standard on “U.S. Higher Education Act, Title IV Participation” was added. It was the shortest-lived standard in ATS Commission history, being replaced in 1996 with a paragraph in Standard 2 on Integrity, where it still stands.

### **The most recent years (1996–2018)**

Only twice in the 80-some-year history of the ATS Commission have the Standards undergone a major revision or redevelopment. The first one was in 1972, which saw many firsts, as described in the previous section. However, the revision that began in 1992 and resulted in the 1996 Standards was arguably the most comprehensive ever, with a nearly start-from-scratch approach. This article will not spend too much time on that revision, as it has been documented quite thoroughly in earlier issues of *Theological Education*. The most thorough documentations of the 1992–1996 revision were published in the Spring 1994 issue that was dedicated to “The Good Theological School” and in the Spring 1996 issue on “Quality and Accreditation: Final Report of the Redeveloped Accrediting Standards.” “The Good Theological School” referenced the overall framing question: *What is the good theological school?* That question guided the entire four-year process, to which two Biennial Meetings were devoted: June 1994 in Atlanta and June 1996 in Denver. Suffice it to say that the redevelopment process was highly participatory and—in an era before emails and websites—very labor intensive. One anecdote attesting to the prodigious output of this process concerns a meeting of the accrediting staff when Dan Aleshire brought in a four-foot tall stack of documents; they were the papers and notes produced over that four-year process. No wonder he viewed June 23, 1996—the day the membership approved those revised standards nearly unanimously after four long, hard years of work—as his very best day at ATS. And it was fitting that the members sang the Doxology to conclude that hard but holy process.

As Dan documented in the fiftieth anniversary issue of *Theological Education* in 2014, the 1996 Standards introduced the third of four movements

in the history of the Commission Standards.<sup>22</sup> The first movement focused on resources, which was true from the first Standards in 1936, but especially so in the 1972 revision—the first major revision, with a preamble that used the word “resources” eight times on one page. The second movement focused on mission, with the first standard on mission or purpose introduced in 1984 and set in a privileged first place. The focus on mission did not replace the focus on resources, but simply added another emphasis. The third movement focused on evaluation, especially assessment of student learning outcomes in 1996, and, again, not as a replacement to the earlier two, but as yet another addition. To be sure, evaluation was introduced in the 1972 revision, but it was not until the 1996 revision that the full impact of this third movement became clear. The 1996 Standards introduced the importance of assessing the outcomes for every single degree program, an emphasis that received even more focus in the last revision in 2012 (see later in this section).

As Dan Aleshire indicated in his 2014 *Theological Education* article, the first two movements were driven internally, for the most part by member schools, who wanted an emphasis on resources and on mission.<sup>23</sup> The third movement, however, was driven mostly by external factors, primarily from public and political calls for more accountability in demonstrating the value of higher education. Some of those calls were concentrated in the US Department of Education, which over the last two decades has introduced what Aleshire called yet a fourth movement in accreditation. That movement emphasizes an increasingly regulatory approach to accreditation by the US government.

While it has been involved in accreditation since the “GI Bill” of 1944, the US government increased its influence under the Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952, which required the government to publish a list of “recognized accrediting agencies” that it would deem as “a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered by an educational institution.” That was the year (1952) that the ATS Commission on Accrediting was first recognized by the US government and put on the list as a “reliable authority” on educational quality. The Higher Education Act of 1965 escalated the US government’s influence considerably by making available federal

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22 Daniel O. Aleshire, “Fifty Years of Accrediting Theological Schools,” *Theological Education* 49, no. 1 (2014).

23 *Ibid.*, 69.

grants and loans only to students enrolled in schools “accredited by an agency recognized” by the US government. With that 1965 Act, accrediting agencies became the “gatekeepers” for federal funds available to students. That gatekeeper role remained a fairly cordial and collaborative one between accrediting agencies and the US government until the 1990s, when it began to be a bit more adversarial with two reauthorizations of the Higher Education Act in that decade. That combative role became readily apparent a decade later in the 2006 Spellings Report<sup>24</sup> under the US Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, which viewed accrediting agencies with considerable suspicion. That adversarial role reached a peak in 2015 with the Department of Education releasing a Transparency Agenda for Accreditation<sup>25</sup> that viewed accrediting agencies as “watchdogs that rarely bite.” Especially disconcerting to accrediting agencies and educators in general are recent regulations that for the first time in US history include such things as a “federal definition of credit hours,” “gainful employment” rules, and “state authorizations” for online education. Still, as Dan Aleshire acknowledged in 2014, this fourth movement seems to be where we might be for some time, with significant implications for accrediting standards now and in the future.

Five revisions followed the last major revision of the Standards from 1992 to 1996. The first came in 1998, when a requirement about “completions and placements” was added to each degree program—in response to new regulations from the US Department of Education and the 1996 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. The next minor revision came in 2000, when a five-page Standard 10 on “Distance Education” was added—the first to reference online education. That was a significant expansion of the standard on “Extension Education,” first introduced in 1982, regarding “Educational Programs Conducted Off-Campus,” which was updated in the 1996 revision as “Extension Education.” The Commission had not approved any online courses until 1999 and none for the MDiv until 2002.

The third minor revision, which ended up being quite significant, was the addition of only one sentence to the 2002 Standards. That sentence allowed up to two years of the MDiv (and one year of professional and

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24 <https://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports/pre-pub-report.pdf>.

25 <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/department-education-advances-transparency-agenda-accreditation>.

academic MA programs) to be completed “by means of distance learning,” which meant online learning. As noted earlier, until 1982 the MDiv (and, in fact, all degree programs) had to be completed on a school’s main campus. The 1982 revision permitted “extension education,” allowing degree programs to be completed off campus, though such sites had to be approved as complete-degree-granting sites. While the 2000 revision was the first to allow some online courses, the 2002 revision was the first to allow substantial online offerings (i.e., up to two-thirds of the MDiv and up to half of professional and academic MA programs). Between 2002 and 2012 (when the Standards permitted completely online programs), 110 ATS schools went online. Some 85 of those (a third of the membership) offered a significant number of online courses, with the result that ATS online enrollment jumped from very few in 2002 to around 12,000 in 2012.

The fourth minor revision came in 2005, when the ATS Standards and Procedures began using a new name: the Commission on Accrediting of The Association of Theological Schools. The Commission at that point became a distinct legal entity separate from the Association. That move was in response to a new requirement from the US Department of Education that accrediting agencies be “separate and independent” of any parent, professional association.

The fifth and final revision came between 2010 and 2012 when the Standards introduced a new Educational Standard, part of a three-tiered wedding cake structure: General Institutional Standards, the Educational Standard, and the Degree Program Standards.<sup>26</sup> The new Educational Standard, approved in 2012, placed particular emphasis on the assessment of student learning outcomes, a topic that had become the number one reason for required reports following comprehensive evaluation visits. One of the most significant changes in the 2012 revision was the allowance for “exceptions and experiments” (summarized in Educational Standard, section ES.1.6.1), including exceptions to residency. While the 2002 revision allowed up to two-thirds of the MDiv and up to half of professional and academic MA programs to be completed online, the 2012 revision made offering the academic MA completely online a routine option and enabled schools to petition for an exception to offer the MDiv and professional MA completely online.

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/accrediting-standards-architecture.pdf>.



Since the first ones were granted in August 2013, more than 70 schools (one-fourth of the accredited members) have submitted nearly 200 petitions for one or more exceptions and experiments, with almost 180 of them approved—150 petitions for online programs. ATS now has more than 50 schools that offer the MDiv completely or almost completely online, more than 50 schools that offer about 80 professional MA programs completely or almost completely online, and another 80-plus academic MA programs at about 50 schools that are also offered completely online. That’s more than 200 ATS degree programs being offered online—all since the 2012 revision. In addition, about a dozen schools have been approved for three- to five-year experiments, including eight mostly online PhD programs, four completely online DMin programs, and three schools offering competency-based MDiv degrees. That amount of innovation comes in no small part from the guiding principle behind the 2010–2012 revision: *rigor with flexibility*. It is a principle that may well guide the next major revision of the Standards, as described in the next section.

### **A look around: A brief review of current accrediting standards (ours and others)**

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In February 2017, the ATS Board of Commissioners authorized a “Preparatory Committee for the Redevelopment of the Standards and Procedures to proceed with its work of designing a plan for [their] redevelopment.” In February 2018, the Board approved a motion on authorizing the redevelopment that is to be brought to the membership at the June 2018 Biennial Meeting in Denver, along with a rationale, timeline, workplan, and input process that involves widespread membership engagement. While this article focuses on the Standards, the other document that is inextricably linked and also can be changed only by the membership is the Procedures. In taking these actions in February of 2017 and 2018, the Board assumed that the next revision would be a major one, reminiscent of the 1996 revision—requiring a thoughtful plan, careful research, broad-based participation from the membership, and multiple drafts for feedback. It also assumed that process would take at least two years (2018–2020). In that context, it seems fitting to look around not only at our current Standards but also at trends in other accrediting standards in the higher education landscape.

*This first section will look at our current Standards, especially in terms of their ongoing effectiveness. One observation made by Commission staff—who work constantly with our current Standards—is that while they are clearly not broken, they are starting to show their age. That is not surprising, given that they were built on work done a quarter century ago during the last major revision (1992–1996). Much has changed among ATS member schools since then. For example, the plurality (45%) of the 230 ATS member schools were mainline Protestant in 1996, two-thirds were freestanding, only 16 offered courses off campus and none were offered online. Two decades later, the plurality (44%) of today’s 270 members are evangelical Protestant, barely half (56%) are freestanding, nearly 40% offer courses off campus, and two-thirds now offer courses or programs online.*

The “typical” student in 1996 was a Caucasian man in his 20s pursuing the MDiv. Soon, the typical ATS student—if such exists anymore—could be a person of color, older than 30, taking most classes online or offsite or in ways still emerging. In addition, the number of professional MA programs has jumped from 100 to more than 250 since 1996. In a few years, the MA could replace the MDiv as the primary degree for many ATS schools, given current cultural, denominational, and enrollment trends. As noted by the Association’s “Preparing for 2040” project, students at ATS schools are not only far more racially and ethnically diverse now than they were 20 years ago (one-fourth of ATS schools have a minority majority enrollment, and within the next five years more than half could), but they are also serving an increasingly diverse world. Similarly, as the ATS projects on global awareness and engagement have indicated, the center of gravity in Christianity has moved from the Global North and West to the Global South and East, and our schools are engaging these realities in new and significant ways. It is not surprising that the Standards may no longer serve our schools as well as they once did.

Ongoing evaluations of the Standards since the 2012 revision show a variety of areas needing attention, which, when taken together, suggests that *more than a minor revision is needed*. As examples, some of the comments gathered during these evaluations include: (1) many of the standards seem overly detailed or too granular and often overly de-limiting (i.e., focused more on specific practices than on overarching principles); (2) the literary approach to the text of the standards can be confusing (e.g., shall vs. should language); (3) the standard on strategic planning seems overly vague; (4) the standard on libraries reflects primarily a resource approach with little

reference to electronic resources, evaluation, or learning outcomes; (5) the standard on faculty may need a broader definition; (6) the standard on students offers more of a collection of practices than an overarching philosophy or educational principle for student services; (7) the standard on governance may benefit from more clarity on what shared governance means today; (8) the standards on financial resources and on clusters may not accurately reflect present realities; (9) the educational standard seems overly prescriptive in areas (extension and distance education) and privileges certain educational models over others; (10) the standards addressing assessment sometimes use confusing language (e.g., degree programs goals vs. learning outcomes); (11) some of the academic guidelines seem unclear (e.g., shared credit); and (12) the Degree Program Standards seem overly duplicative in places and at times overly prescriptive, which raises the question of whether we still need 48 pages covering ten different degree programs. The Board of Commissioners has observed some of the “age” of certain sections of the Standards (particularly regarding residency) in the nearly 200 petitions for exceptions and experiments submitted since the 2012 revision. More generally, the membership indicated in a 2016 survey (by the Executive Director Search Committee) that one of its highest priorities is “a revision of accrediting standards to be relevant and flexible and to encourage innovation.”

In addition to the revision of particular sections of the Standards, the increasing diversity of our membership (e.g., regarding new institutional structures and innovative educational models and practices) suggests that the current framing of the Standards as a whole may no longer be adequate. The framing question from 1992 to 1996 was: *What is the good theological school?* The framing question now may be: *What is good (graduate) theological education? Or, What do we want to see in the good theological*

“ *The framing question from 1992 to 1996 was: What is the good theological school? The framing question now may be: What is good (graduate) theological education? Or, What do we want to see in the good theological school graduate? Or, What are the key principles undergirding good theological education?* ”

*school graduate? Or, What are the key principles undergirding good theological education?* The former frame tends to focus on institutional inputs with rather prescriptive standards, while the others focus more on educational outcomes with somewhat flexible standards. Whatever the framing question(s) or even whether there will be a single framing question, it still seems clear that the next revision will be substantive.

*This second section will look at trends in other accrediting standards* in the higher education landscape. While our Standards must always remain our Standards, we do not operate in a vacuum. In fact, three-fourths of our member schools are also accredited by another agency. It seems appropriate then to take a quick look at what other accrediting agencies have done recently with their standards. One trend is that current standards for other accreditors tend to be briefer (15–25 pages vs. our nearly 100 pages) and broader, being based more on generally stated quality educational *principles* than on specifically delineated best educational *practices*. They also tend to make explicit their underlying assumptions and core values, something that may be increasingly necessary in order for us to clarify our distinctively theological focus and our long-standing emphasis on improvement over compliance or consumer protection (see earlier discussion on the “fourth movement” in accreditation: increasing regulation).

Another trend is that accrediting standards are written in simple declarative sentences. Current standards tend not to use “shall” or “should” statements or “must” language. One accrediting agency, for example, in describing its recent revision process affirmed that it was committed to revised standards that “are written as declarative sentences [that] contain no ‘must’ or ‘should’ statements” but rather “describe the functioning of an institution worthy of accreditation . . . [and] represent aspirational goals that should be met at least minimally.” The 446 “shall” statements and 231 “should” statements in our current Standards sometimes confuse our member schools as to whether or not something is “required.”

One final trend noted here is that other standards require educational programs to demonstrate quality, regardless of delivery. Recent standards of other agencies tend not to privilege any particular educational model, but instead prefer language like “wherever and however this program is delivered” or “faculty (full-time or part-time)” or “learning resources (however they are provided).” The trend is not only to permit innovation and flexibility but also to encourage it. In revising its standards, one agency aptly noted:

Because the accreditation decision is prospective and because the goal is to develop Standards that will be in effect for a decade, the Standards should reflect, insofar as is possible, those expectations that are likely to be important not just now but also for the next several years” and will “value innovation supported by evidence of effectiveness [since] the ability to innovate and change, done responsibly, is a treasured hallmark of [North] American higher education.”<sup>27</sup>

The “prospective” nature of accrediting standards and their openness to innovation are two key areas being explored by ATS schools through the Lilly-funded Educational Models and Practices Project.<sup>28</sup> That four-year project (2015–2018) constitutes a major research resource examining the effectiveness of our current Standards and provides a broad “look around” at what is going on among our member schools. As noted earlier, since the last revision of the Standards in 2012, about a fourth of our member schools have submitted nearly 150 petitions for one or more exceptions or experiments, with almost all of them approved—mostly for exceptions to residency. Among the nearly dozen experiments granted, two address MDiv programs that are offered entirely as competency-based education—with no traditional courses, no residency (but not online), and an expanding definition of faculty that involves significant involvement from constituent churches. Such emerging models surely have ramifications for the next revision of the Standards.

## **A look ahead: A few concluding remarks**

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The future is uncertain, but standards of accreditation always carry assumptions, including assumptions about their purpose and their role, not only for member institutions but also for the larger public. The future purpose of accreditation itself is increasingly being viewed with suspicion—at least in the United States—by politicians and policymakers who question its ongoing role in assuring quality education. Countering this emerging attitude of suspicion is this statement by Judith Eaton, president of the non-governmental Council

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<sup>27</sup> [https://cihe.neasc.org/sites/cihe.neasc.org/files/downloads/Standards\\_Revision\\_Process/StandardsRevisionDiscussionPaperJanuary2015.pdf](https://cihe.neasc.org/sites/cihe.neasc.org/files/downloads/Standards_Revision_Process/StandardsRevisionDiscussionPaperJanuary2015.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.ats.edu/resources/current-initiatives/educational-models-and-practices-theological-education>.

*Accreditation Standards: A Look Back and a Look Around*

for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA): “*Accreditation is a trust-based, standards-based, evidence-based, judgment-based, peer-based process.*” Standards form the written basis for assuring (and advancing) quality, but they do not do that in a vacuum. Standards are always subject to interpretation, which ATS places in the hands of peers and their professional judgment, based on evidence provided by member institutions. That approach to accrediting and standards is fundamental to the trustworthiness of the entire accreditation process. The ATS Commission has consistently focused on how its Standards can help all member schools achieve their individual missions—in a spirit of encouragement and improvement, not of compliance and discouragement. To quote again from the 1936 Standards, “there is no desire to enforce these standards in an arbitrary fashion; [they] are to be administered by the Commission on Accrediting . . . by way of stimulus and encouragement.” That was true then, is true now, and will be true until Jesus returns.

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# Reimagining Assessment in Theological Education (via the Appalachian Trail)

*Debbie Creamer*

*The Association of Theological Schools*

*ABSTRACT: This essay will explore how we might reclaim assessment from interpretations and practices that make it seem compliance-driven, technical, and reductive, and will instead propose a way forward that emphasizes stewardship, curiosity, and care. By exploring how assessment can be used to preserve and enhance well-loved resources like the Appalachian Trail, this essay will offer reframing strategies that can help us claim assessment and evaluation as activities appropriate to and worthy of theological educators.*

As a child, I didn't dream of becoming an accreditor or an assessment specialist. Even now, I don't always wake up in the morning feeling particularly excited to be doing accreditation or assessment—and I know I'm not alone. As I work with ATS schools, it's still a bit unusual to find administrators or faculty who look forward to their annual assessment days, or to collating and analyzing assessment data, or to preparing assessment reports. Even when I do find people who appreciate these processes,

“During Dan Aleshire's tenure at ATS, our schools made huge progress in developing meaningful and contextually appropriate assessment strategies.

I still see them struggling to find a meaningful balance of time and energy, as well as philosophy and approach, in order to sustain this work. For many of us, assessment can feel like an externally imposed requirement, where outsiders like me harass overworked and underfunded

schools like you into preparing polished but meaningless statements of educational effectiveness, and where you feel forced into assessment plans that seem to take more time and energy than teaching itself.

During Dan Aleshire's tenure at ATS, our schools made huge progress in developing meaningful and contextually appropriate assessment strategies. The number of required reports on assessment has decreased

significantly, and the quality of assessment plans has dramatically improved. At the same time, however, governmental and other pressures have increased in ways that make this work even more challenging. We feel this in the increasing call for easily measured outcomes like graduation rates, placement rates, and loan default rate—and, while these numbers sometimes have value (you want to know if a particular category of students regularly fail to graduate or are unable to pay off their loans, for example), they are also sloppy ways to measure educational success (e.g., diploma mills typically have a 100% graduate rate, assuming one pays the appropriate fees). In addition, this emphasis on outcomes fails to attend to the nuances of theological education, including that, in our contexts, sometimes “success” is not our highest priority—both as we take risks with the widest possible range of students and also as we recognize that the best way to serve a student may be to help them recognize that their calling should take them elsewhere than seminary.

Accrediting agencies like ours also deserve some of the blame for assessment-fatigue, especially insofar as we have scared folks into doing more and more assessment work without helping them understand how to connect it to their missions and passions. It is telling that the 2012 revision of the ATS Commission Standards added the language of “simple and sustainable” to the stated expectations for assessment plans as a response to the proliferation of ones that were burdensome and unhelpfully complex. We might now understand assessment to be important, but we still struggle to engage it in meaningful and life-giving ways.

But back to my daydreaming. When I have a day off, or when I have the chance to fantasize about a life not taken, I picture myself as a serious hiker. In real life, I am simply a casual walker; my equipment consists only of good shoes, a hiking stick, and when I remember it, a water bottle. But, in spite of my own limits, I am in love with the Appalachian Trail (A.T.). On road trips or accreditation visits, I go out of my way for the chance to intersect the A.T., and my best days off are the ones where I get to spend part of a day following those two-inch by six-inch white blazes through Appalachian forests and alongside zig-zagging streams. In my spare time, I read stories of thru-hikers, learn about equipment, and enjoy hearing about best (and worst) practices. And on bad days, I imagine leaving everything behind except for what I can carry on my back, hitching a ride to Georgia, and taking up life as a thru-hiker on the Appalachian Trail.



As I write this, I recognize that hiking and/or daydreaming about the A.T. might not be your thing. My description of it might not even resonate with you. But I imagine that there is something that you care about

“*The thesis for my essay is that assessment works when we do it out of love, curiosity, and stewardship—not out of bureaucratic obligation, out of defensiveness, or to appease external audiences.*

deeply, something that you find fascinating or evocative outside of the world of theological education. Perhaps it is fishing, or quilting, or bicycling, or craft beer. Or maybe it's your family: nuclear or extended, by birth or by choice, human or pet. Perhaps it is more noble than the Appalachian Trail: world peace, racial justice, environmental attentiveness. Perhaps it is something less

noble but equally beautiful. In any case, I would invite you to think about that specific thing that pleases you, that calls to you, that matters to you. As I think and talk about the A.T., I would invite you to translate my images to ones that mean something to you. The key—which is something that Dan Aleshire modeled so completely—is that we need to begin by caring deeply, and then follow where that leads us.

The thesis for my essay is that assessment works when we do it out of love, curiosity, and stewardship—not out of bureaucratic obligation, out of defensiveness, or to appease external audiences. When I give presentations about educational assessment, I talk about it as the intersection of curiosity, passion, and expertise; I also suggest that assessment can (and should) be fun. But this can be hard for my audience to hear or believe, especially if their sense of educational assessment has been tainted by experiences that are bureaucratic, boring, or exhausting. It is hard to change mindsets when we start from such a heavy and depressing point. Consequently, rather than thinking about assessment in the midst of the pressures that have become so common in higher education, I would invite you to imagine it in relation to the Appalachian Trail (or whatever else you care about deeply). My hope is that this will give us a fresh start and may help us find new energy and images that lead us forward.

## Encountering the trail

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*One day's exposure to mountains is better than cartloads of books.*

~ *John Muir*, *John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir*

The National Park Service describes the Appalachian Trail as “a 2180+ mile long public footpath that traverses the scenic, wooded, pastoral, wild, and culturally resonant lands of the Appalachian Mountains.”<sup>1</sup> The trail winds its way from Katahdin Mountain in Maine to Springer Mountain in Georgia, crossing through New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. The trail was first proposed in 1921 and was completed in 1937, although “completion” is a bit of a misnomer because the trail shifts a bit every year as land-rights change, as trail councils address issues of erosion and environmental damage, and as hikers create shortcuts or switchbacks. In fact, no one knows the exact distance of the A.T. from end to end because it is constantly in flux. Today, the majority of the trail is on public land and is managed by the National Park Service, the US Forest Service, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy (ATC), numerous state agencies, and thousands of volunteers.

It is estimated by the ATC that three million visitors hike some portion of the Appalachian Trail each year—mostly via day hikes and short backpacking trips—and that many of these access the trail from well-known and high-traffic areas.<sup>2</sup> Those who hike the entire A.T. in 12 months or less are called thru-hikers; others choose to engage the trail as section-hikers, only hiking one portion at a time, and often taking years (or decades) to complete the entire trail. The ATC hosts a voluntary registry of hikers; from this, they observe that, while thousands of hikers attempt a thru-hike each year, only about one in four makes it all the way. The ATC describes thru-hiking as “a grueling and demanding endeavor” that “requires great physical and mental stamina and determination.”<sup>3</sup> The trail is often rocky,

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1 National Park Service, [www.nps.gov/appa/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/appa/index.htm).

2 Appalachian Trail Conservancy, [www.appalachiantrail.org](http://www.appalachiantrail.org).

3 Appalachian Trail Conservancy, [www.appalachiantrail.org/home/explore-the-trail/thru-hiking/faqs](http://www.appalachiantrail.org/home/explore-the-trail/thru-hiking/faqs).

is regularly muddy, and sometimes involves fording dangerous streams; overall, the elevation gain and loss from end to end is roughly equivalent to hiking Mount Everest from sea level and back 16 times. Given all this, it may be surprising to learn that more than 18,000 hike completions have been recorded since records were first kept in 1936,<sup>4</sup> that completions have been recorded by hikers of all ages and abilities, and that hikers regularly describe the A.T. as “one of the most rewarding, exhilarating, and memorable ways you can spend six months of your life.”<sup>5</sup>

## Assessing the trail

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*There are three things: to walk, to see, and to see what you see.*  
~ Benton MacKaye, *An Appalachian Trail:*  
A Project in Regional Planning

Until recently, if you had asked me about the relationship between assessment and the Appalachian Trail, I would only have named the kinds of assessment that tend to be done by the individual hiker herself. These sorts of “assessments” have captured the public imagination, too, in such books-turned-movies as *Wild* by Cheryl Strayed or *A Walk in the Woods* by Bill Bryson. Folks who are considering a thru-hike might spend a year or more planning their trips, setting goals for their physical conditioning, researching and acquiring their gear, and so on. In each of these areas, they need to assess when they have done enough preparation to begin, as well as engage in ongoing assessment about whether and how to change their plans. For example, most thru-hikers discard some of their gear along the way as they discover what they don’t need, or swap out their equipment for lighter or more waterproof options. Three out of four hikers who begin a thru-hike will abandon it. This, too, itself suggests a sort of self-assessment: Do I have the energy to complete this? Will my blisters get better? Is this what I want to be doing right now? These sorts of self-assessments remind me of those done by our students: Should I enroll? Which degree should I take? Can I complete this? They also remind me of how an

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4 Appalachian Trail Conservancy, [www.appalachiantrail.org/home/community/2000-milers](http://www.appalachiantrail.org/home/community/2000-milers).

5 Appalachian Trail Conservancy, [www.appalachiantrail.org/home/explore-the-trail/thru-hiking/faqs](http://www.appalachiantrail.org/home/explore-the-trail/thru-hiking/faqs).

instructor might evaluate a course (What went well? What might I change next time around?) or how an institution might evaluate potential graduates (Do we affirm their academic abilities? Do we recommend them for ministry?). We are like hikers: setting goals, gathering data, raising questions, making decisions, and (sometimes) implementing change.

However, the kind of assessment we are called to do as theological educators is not only the assessment of or by the hiker. It is also the assessment of the trail. And, in fact, it is this latter kind of assessment that ATS requires of its member schools, through the process of accreditation. It almost goes without saying that the hiker will evaluate whether her pack is too heavy, whether her shoes are too small, whether she can make it to the final peak. But someone also needs to tend to the trail. For the Appalachian Trail, this level of assessment is embodied and enacted through local volunteer hiking clubs as well as umbrella agencies such as the ATC, which describes its mission as “to preserve and manage the Appalachian Trail—ensuring that its vast natural beauty and priceless cultural heritage can be shared and enjoyed today, tomorrow, and for centuries to come.”<sup>6</sup> Each of these clubs and groups, large and small, engages in assessment—and not the collection of random information that then gets stored in filing cabinets until an accrediting body asks for it, but an assessment grounded in intentional curiosity and care that helps them advance their missions. This is a level of assessment that hikers (and daydreamers) might never see, but it is essential to the quality of hiker experiences now as well as to protect the trail’s resources for the future.

For example, the ATC has recognized that it needs to attend not only to obvious threats to the trail (housing developments, climate change) but also to “a more nuanced, internal threat from the people who love the trail the most.”<sup>7</sup> With millions of visitors each year on the trail and with particularly heavy usage in iconic locations or near population centers, there is a need to balance competing interests—the more people use the trail, the more they love and support it; the more people use the trail, the more they harm and wear it out. This awareness has led to a variety of efforts that we might recognize as an assessment cycle. Based on its initial questions/

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6 Appalachian Trail Conservancy, [www.appalachiantrail.org/home/about-us/mission-vision-values](http://www.appalachiantrail.org/home/about-us/mission-vision-values).

7 Tenny Webster, “Hot spots: Evidence-based methods to uphold the health of a popular trail,” *A.T. Journeys*, Summer 2016, 22.

concerns (What's the current impact on the trail? How do we better protect the trail?), the ATC undertook significant data collection efforts (counting actual usage and measuring impacts such as tree damage, improper waste disposal, unauthorized campsites, and so on), analyzed the data, and then developed intervention strategies to respond to what they had discovered (a voluntary registry of thru-hikers, increased Leave No Trace educational efforts, additional locations for campsites). From here, the various agencies involved have been continuing to assess their efforts, to observe whether the efforts are having the desired impact on the trail (setting benchmarks for success and then evaluating whether they have met their goals) as well as to discern where the intervention strategies need to be adjusted (e.g., revising the registry to be more user friendly and to incorporate section and weekend hikers)—the infamous “assess the assessment plan.” An unexpected benefit of this work has been that it has not only served to preserve the integrity of the trail itself but has also improved the user experience, for example, by helping hikers find available campsites or solitude.<sup>8</sup> As with our schools, the assessment we do for the good of our institutions (and, for theological education more broadly) can also directly serve our students.

It is important to note that assessment is useful not only for preservation but also for progress. For example, one of the ATC's data-gathering initiatives has focused on the demographics of hikers. In 2014, they found that of approximately 3,000 registered thru-hikers, 28% were female; in 2016, of the hikers who reported race or ethnicity, 2% were Hispanic or Latino/a, 2.5% were Asian, and less than 1% were African American.<sup>9</sup> By gathering qualitative data from women hikers and hikers of color who describe experiences of harassment and discrimination on the trail and in the towns that surround it, stakeholders are better able to stage interventions and work toward change.<sup>10</sup> This, too, is the familiar cycle of assessment—asking questions, collecting data, analyzing data, implementing change, and assessing the results of these processes.

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8 Jessica Porter, “A PATHE to preservation,” *A.T. Journeys*, Winter 2017, 17.

9 Rahway Haile, “We go it alone,” *Outside Magazine*, May 2017, 96.

10 Tik Root, “Changing the Face of National Parks,” *National Geographic*, February 2017, <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/02/diversity-in-national-parks/>.

## **Passion, curiosity, and expertise**

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*Travel by foot. There is so much you can't identify at top speed.*

*~ Cheryl Strayed, Brave Enough*

One thing that intrigues me about assessment in the context of the Appalachian Trail is that no one is telling the ATC or other agencies that they need to do assessment; in fact, most of the work is done by volunteers—and, eagerly so. Why is it that these folks take on assessment so enthusiastically and with such a clear sense of it as a meaningful and useful activity—and yet we struggle so much with it? As I noted earlier, when I give presentations about educational assessment, I talk about it as the intersection of passion, curiosity, and expertise. These three characteristics can be readily seen in the assessment strategies for the Appalachian Trail, and I see them as central to the success of their process and outcomes.

### **Passion**

The ATC folks engage in evaluation because they want the best for the trail and for those who use it. The trail exists almost exclusively due to the efforts of volunteers, with more than 250,000 volunteer hours recorded last year.<sup>11</sup> These volunteers give their time freely to help other hikers, to preserve the trail for the future, and even just to have an excuse to spend time on it themselves—and, as part of this, they recognize an interdependence of passions, where one volunteer might care deeply about one aspect of trail life (perhaps conservation) and another might care deeply about something else (perhaps advocacy). Together, these passions allow them to engage in assessment in ways that are fulsome and meaningful—not out of a sense of defensiveness or anxiety (the land will outlast them!) nor of going through the motions, but rather because they care about the trail and want the best for it, now and in the future.

### **Curiosity**

Because of their passion for the trail, volunteers and agencies want to understand it better and then to be able to make data-informed decisions. They are purposefully curious. Because they experience limited resources (money and volunteer hours), they have to prioritize their efforts—and

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11 Jessica Porter, "The soul of the Appalachian Trail," *A.T. Journeys*, Spring 2017, 10.

assessment helps them determine what is most pressing, and which efforts are most impactful.<sup>12</sup> Because they want to improve hiker experiences, they have to address sticky problems (e.g., how to reach communities of color, how to positively impact trail towns)—and assessment helps them here as well.<sup>13</sup> This sort of curiosity also draws on a sense of humility. Rather than drawing only on their own “hunches” (that tend to be skewed to one’s own perspective), this sort of curiosity allows them to ask interesting questions and then seek out data that might even prove them wrong—all for the good of the trail.

## Expertise

Because of their passion for and curiosity about the A.T., the people from the ATC and individual hiking clubs are—in many ways—the best ones to be defining the benchmarks and indicators for success as they evaluate the current state and future potential of the trail. This is not a time to listen only to those who are seeking to make money or who have other interests, nor only to those who have no idea of what the trail means to those who use it. Capitalists and bureaucrats, for example, might look only at the bottom line and suggest that a good outcome is to sell or rent parcels of land or to move the trail to areas that are less costly and also less scenic. It is important that assessment be driven by those who seek the best for the trail as a trail, who understand its history and potential, who recognize what it gives to those who use it, and who desire to preserve it while also making it even more accessible for a wider range of folks. At the same time, it is also important that these stakeholders recognize their own limits as far as assessment is concerned and that they embrace an interdependent perspective that draws not only on the experiences of thru-hikers but also on the expertise of those who bring a wide range of skills and gifts (scientists, publicists, fundraisers) and those who may be a bit contrary-minded and who allow the trail-fanatics to focus their efforts and sharpen their arguments.

These are likely not the only characteristics that contribute to the success (of process and outcome) of the assessment strategies used within the Appalachian Trail community, but these do offer us a glimpse of what

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12 Dennis Shaffer, “Landscapes of the Appalachian Trail,” *A.T. Journeys*, Winter 2017, 39.

13 Jessica Porter, “A PATHE to preservation,” *A.T. Journeys*, Winter 2017, 13.

a meaningful assessment process might look and feel like outside of the heaviness of educational assessment. Passion and interdependence, curiosity and humility, and expertise and limits—taken together, these form the foundation of healthy practices that help foster information-based decision making, integrity to stakeholders, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

## Closing thoughts

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*It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.*

~ *Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*, *The Little Prince*

As I noted at the beginning, I am aware that my readers might not care about the Appalachian Trail the way I do. But my hope is that the narrative here offers a glimpse of how assessment works (and works well) in this context, and that it might also resonate with whatever else you might care deeply about—including theological education. This combination of passion, curiosity, and expertise has the potential to ground our assessment work from the inside—not as bureaucratic or compliance-driven, but as something we do out of love and stewardship. When assessment works well at our schools, it carries this sort of beauty. It is grounded in a deep passion for our students, our institutions, our disciplines, our churches, and our communities. It is fed by a playful curiosity, a desire to learn, a bravery to ask and explore risky questions. And it is scaffolded by the wisdom and expertise that we bring to our work, particularly as those are based in the mission and context of our institutions as well as our own vocational journeys. If we can do assessment from these places—rather than out of fear, defensiveness, obligation, or boredom—I believe that our assessment process can be meaningful, energizing, and perhaps even fun.

I was surprised when Dan Aleshire invited me to join the ATS staff, and then again when I was asked to take the lead for our assessment work—I'm not very good at following rules or doing things because they're supposed to be done, and I never dreamed of being a bureaucrat. But then again, neither did Dan. In his book *Earthen Vessels*, as in so many other places, he grounds his work in an appreciation of theological schools (not a critique or suspicion of them), and he talks about assessment mattering because we care about the subjects we teach and we care about the people



and institutions our students will serve as graduates.<sup>14</sup> He invited us as staff colleagues to come and share this sense of appreciation, to embody

“ . . . he grounds his work in an appreciation of theological schools (not a critique or suspicion of them), and he talks about assessment mattering because we care about the subjects we teach and we care about the people and institutions our students will serve as graduates.

it as we work with our schools, and to bring our own curiosities, passion, and expertise to this work. When he hired us, he knew the gifts and interests we each brought—and with me comes not only my academic and accrediting experience but also my love for trees and trails, for curiosity, and for exploration. My hope is that this not only continues to feed my own work but also can be a model

that helps our schools reclaim assessment and evaluation as activities worthy of theological educators.

*Debbie Creamer is Director, Accreditation and Institutional Evaluation at The Association of Theological Schools in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.*

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14 Daniel Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), xiii and 52.



# Programs, Services, and Initiatives



# Shifting Vocational Identity in Theological Education: Insights from the ATS Student Questionnaires

*Jo Ann Deasy*

*The Association of Theological Schools*

*ABSTRACT: For more than two decades, The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) has used the Entering and Graduating Student and Alumni/ae Questionnaires to track vocational trajectories and to understand the different ways that students use theological education to prepare for ministry. Dan Aleshire believed such questions were at the heart of theological education. During his tenure at ATS, Aleshire used the student questionnaires to explore the effectiveness of theological education, and those insights helped to inform his 2008 book on the future of theological education, *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools*. This article builds on those insights to challenge how theological schools are adapting to a rapidly advancing future.*

The ATS Student Questionnaires (the Qs) have attempted to capture the vocational plans of incoming seminary students, graduates, and alumni/ae since 1996. Created in a time when ministry was just beginning to professionalize and diversify, the Qs began with 21 potential ministry positions from which students could choose. Titles for the positions varied, and many focused on the locations where students would be serving: parish ministry, campus ministry, inner-city ministry, hospital chaplaincy, college/university teaching, foreign missions, etc. Others focused on specialized approaches to ministry: pastoral counseling, social services, church planting/evangelism, youth ministry, etc. All of them, except perhaps social work/services, focused on teaching or ministry. Anything outside these two realms was categorized as “other.”

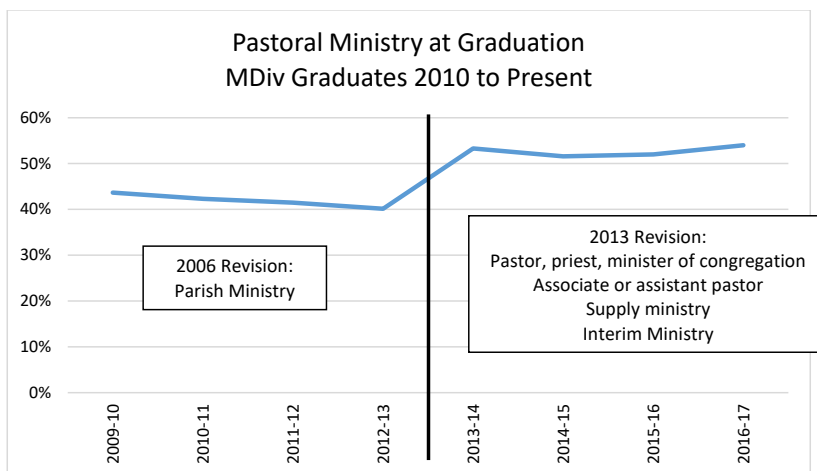
Over the next two decades, several revisions were made to the Qs, but there were no major changes to the questions regarding vocation until 2013. The 2013 revision was the first to include a list of potential positions outside of traditional ministry or teaching settings. These included clerical/office/sales, medicine/engineering/law, full-time homemaking or

childcare, and executive/administrator in a for-profit business. In addition, ministry positions were divided into two categories: ministry in a congregation/parish or ministry in an “other” setting.

These changes reflected the growing perception that graduates of theological schools were no longer serving in traditional ministry settings. The assumption was that many students were attending seminary for the purpose of personal growth rather than for professional development. In addition, the questionnaires attempted to reflect shifts in the understanding of the nature of ministry. No longer limited to the role of pastor or priest within a congregation or parish, students were pursuing a variety of specialized ministries both within and outside of congregations in a variety of settings including educational institutions, nonprofits, and community service organizations.

The questionnaire added several new ministry categories including supply ministry, interim ministry, military chaplaincy, prison ministry, and religious or parachurch agency/organization. Perhaps the most significant new categories were “associate or assistant pastor, priest, or minister” and “unsure what position within a congregation/parish.” The Graduating Student Questionnaire (GSQ) also altered the language of the question itself from “What position will you have after graduation?” to “What position do you anticipate having after graduation?” These two categories, along with a slight change to the wording of the question, significantly impacted how students answered the questionnaires and provided new insights into the vocational goals of students.

Prior to 2013, the assumption was that the number of students pursuing congregational ministry was rapidly declining. With the addition of these two new categories, the number of students pursuing congregational ministry increased significantly. Students were not leaving congregational ministry; they either did not have a position at graduation or were pursuing ministry in ways that did not fit our old categories. Many of them were still planning on congregational ministry. However, they were unsure of what that ministry would look like. The option to choose a more open-ended role like “associate or assistant pastor, priest, or minister” or “unsure what position within a congregation/parish” helped clarify for us that more students were planning on congregational ministry than we previously thought.



Source: ATS Graduating Student Questionnaire

The 2013 revision also recognized that many students were already serving in congregations. Entering students were directly asked if they were currently serving in ministerial work and whether or not they planned to continue working in that same position while pursuing their degrees. In the GSQ, students were given the option to choose “ministry in the same congregation/parish where I served before graduation” when describing their vocational goals. In fall 2017, 49% of entering master’s students reported current engagement in ministerial work, with 76% planning on continuing in that work while in seminary. Among 2017 master’s graduates, 32% reported that they were already serving in a congregation at graduation.

In addition, while bi-vocational ministry was hinted at in an earlier revision, it was not until 2013 entering and graduating students were asked if they had any plans to go into bi-vocational ministry after graduation. In 2017, 30% of all graduates reported plans to serve in bi-vocational ministry. Percentages were higher among black/non-Hispanic graduates (57%) and Hispanic/Latino(a) graduates (41%).

Revisions of the ATS Student Questionnaires highlight changes in student vocational trajectories. They also help us understand the different ways that students are using theological education to prepare for ministry. We’ll look at these areas in more depth, but we’ll begin by exploring how theological education itself actually shapes those trajectories by looking at the impact MDiv programs have on a student’s call to serve in a congregation.

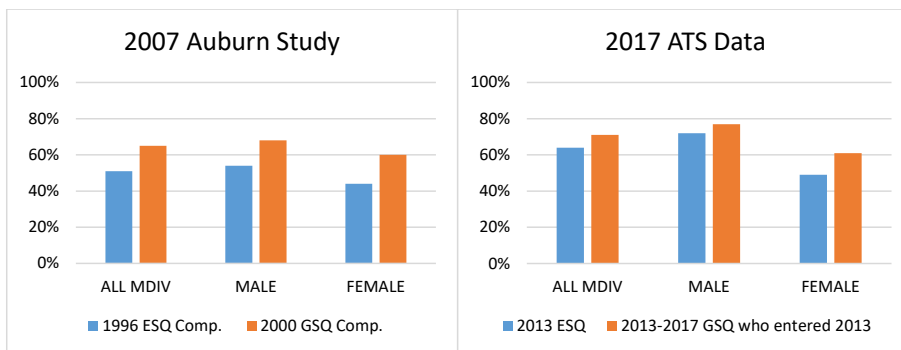
## The impact of MDiv programs on a call to ministry

In 1996, 47% of all students responding to the ATS Graduating Student Questionnaire (GSQ) reported that they were planning on parish ministry at graduation. By 2012, that number had dropped to 31%. The decline in students pursuing parish ministry over the years caused some people to wonder if theological schools were discouraging students from pursuing pastoral ministry.

In 2007, the Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education published a study titled, “How are We Doing? The Effectiveness of Theological Schools as Measured by the Vocations and Views of Graduates.” Coauthored by Daniel Aleshire, Sharon Miller, and Barbara Wheeler, the study attempted to measure the impact theological schools had on the vocational trajectories of students by comparing data on MDiv students from the 1996 ATS Entering Student Questionnaire (ESQ) with data on MDiv students from the 2000 GSQ. The report showed that MDiv students were more likely to plan on serving in a congregation or parish setting at graduation than they were when they entered seminary.<sup>1</sup>

More recent data comparing MDiv students who completed the ESQ in 2013 with those who reported starting seminary in 2013 and who completed the GSQ from 2013 to 2017 also show that MDiv students are more likely to plan on serving in a congregation or parish setting at graduation. However, the difference is not as extreme.

The Auburn data showed that from the time they entered seminary to the time they graduated, 14% more students planned on pursuing



<sup>1</sup> Daniel Aleshire, Sharon Miller, and Barbara Wheeler, “How are We Doing? The Effectiveness of Theological Schools as Measured by the Vocations and Views of Graduates,” *The Auburn Center for the Study of Theological Education*, 2007, 3.

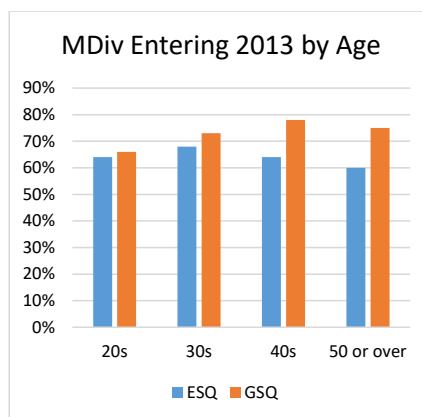


ministry in a congregation. In 2013, that percentage dropped to 8%. This drop, however, is partially offset by an increase in the percentage of MDiv students planning to pursue congregational ministry when they enter seminary from 51% in 1996 to 64% in 2013.

The Auburn study noted that “the rate of increase of women’s interest during their theological school years is as much as—in fact, slightly more than—men’s.”<sup>2</sup> In 2013, the difference was even greater, with the percentage of female students considering congregational ministry increasing by approximately 12% and the percentage of male students increasing by just 5%. This suggests that theological schools have a more significant impact on the vocational trajectories of female MDiv students toward congregational ministry. However, there is not a corresponding increase in the overall percentage of female graduates pursuing congregational ministry. In fact, the percentage of female MDiv students pursuing congregational ministry at graduation has remained fairly steady at 60–61% since 1996, while the percentage of male students increased from 68% to 77%.

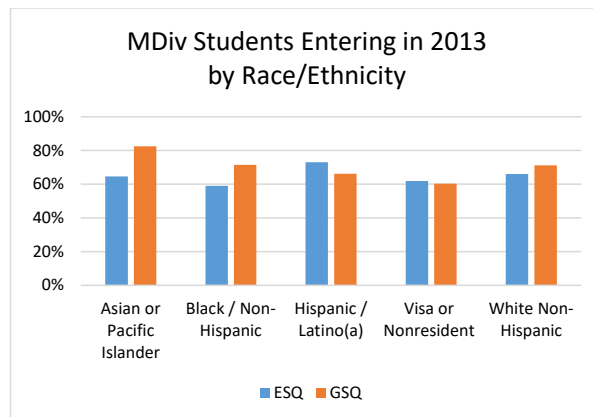
Among MDiv students who entered in 2013, differences were also seen by individual factors such as age and race/ethnicity as well whether or not the school is located in the United States or Canada.

Note that a higher percentage of students in their 30s entered seminary planning on congregational/parish ministry. However, a higher percentage of students older than 40 were likely to shift their vocational trajectories in seminary to congregational/parish ministry, suggesting that seminary has a greater impact on the vocational goals of older students.

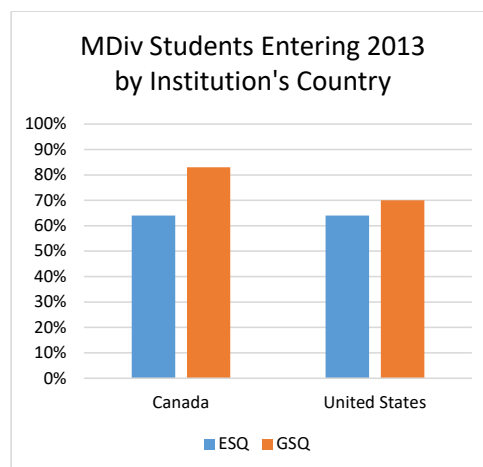


2 Ibid.

## Shifting Vocational Identity in Theological Education



In terms of race/ethnicity, Asian/Pacific Islander and black/non-Hispanic students were more likely to shift their vocational trajectories toward congregational ministry during seminary than were their white, Hispanic/Latino(a) or visa/nonresident counterparts. In fact, Hispanic/Latino(a) students were the only students who were less likely to pursue congregational ministry at graduation than when entering seminary. A number of possible reasons might be posited for this trend among Hispanic/Latino(a) students. On the positive side, perhaps they are being encouraged to pursue doctoral studies. It's possible, though, that Hispanic/Latino(a) students do not feel that theological education adequately prepares them for the congregations and ministries that exist within their own communities.



Perhaps the greatest difference is seen when considering theological schools in the United States or Canada. While the same percentage (64%) of MDiv students who completed the ESQ at institutions in the United States and in Canada planned on congregational/parish ministry, a much larger percentage from Canadian institutions (83% vs. 70%) plan on congregational ministry at graduation.

The data suggest that theological schools have an impact on the vocational trajectories of students, encouraging them to pursue ministry in a congregation or parish setting.<sup>3</sup> Many of these students will end up in bi-vocational ministry. Data from the GSQ indicates that almost one-third of 2017 graduates are planning on bi-vocational ministry. Percentages are even higher for black/non-Hispanic (57%) and Hispanic/Latino(a) (41%) graduates. For some, bi-vocational ministry is a way of expressing a call that believes a pastor can best serve the church by also being involved in a secular career or in the local community. For others, it is a way of expressing multiple vocational goals. For many, though, bi-vocational ministry is a response to the financial needs of a community or congregation.

The growing number of graduates going into bi-vocational ministry raises several questions about theological education. The first is an ethical one. Do theological schools need to create educational and financial models that will allow students to graduate without educational debt, allowing them to consider positions in congregations that cannot afford full-time pastors? The second question is more educational and formational. What are the unique skills needed to prepare someone for bi-vocational ministry? Are there particular ways of thinking that need to be cultivated? Are there ways to help students develop a portfolio of skills that will allow them to structure a bi-vocational life that can support them financially? Should theological schools develop part-time programs that intentionally teach students how to live and think bi-vocationally as they balance work and school?

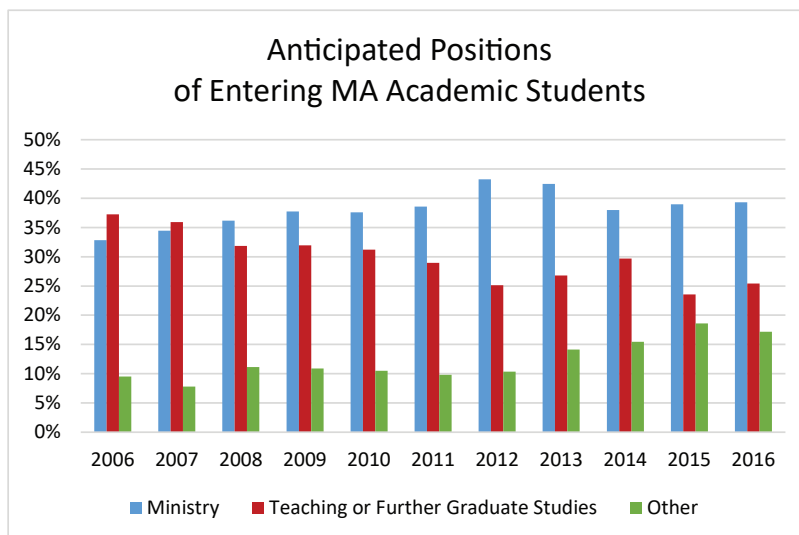
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<sup>3</sup> It is also possible that some of these data reflect the fact that students who are not planning on ministry in a congregation or parish are less likely to graduate or take longer to graduate from seminary.

## Shifting purpose: Using the MA academic degree to prepare for ministry

In his book, *Earthen Vessels*, Dan Aleshire writes, “Learning in theological schools has historically been intended for two different vocational uses, either professional ministry or academic mastery.”<sup>4</sup> Much emphasis has been given to changes in the number of students pursuing professional ministry, but what is happening among those students attending seminary to pursue academic mastery?

The master’s degrees normally associated with academic mastery are grouped under the title “MA Academic” in the ESQ. Data from the ESQ between 2006 and 2016 show a decrease in MA Academic students intending to pursue teaching or further graduate studies from 47% to 26%. This is a significant change, not only in the percentage of students pursuing teaching or graduate studies but also in the way students are using the MA Academic degree. Rather than pursuing teaching, a growing number of students are using the degree to prepare for ministry or other vocations.



There are many possibilities for this shift. The MA Academic degree is a shorter degree that often allows for more flexibility. This is important for the growing number of students who are already in ministry when

4 Daniel O. Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and the Future of Theological Schools* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 39.

they enter seminary. Flexibility is also increasingly important for younger students who expect student-centered learning that is customized to their needs and learning styles. Students who come to seminary with years of ministerial experience are often not seeking to improve their pastoral skills, but rather to increase knowledge that will serve their preaching and teaching.

In *Earthen Vessels*, Aleshire notes this change. Writing from the institutional perspective, he noted that the “differentiation between professional and academic degrees has been getting muddier.”<sup>5</sup> He goes on to say “the academic-professional distinction is based on an educational assumption that the nature of learning to function in a complex role is different from learning the various subjects that inform that role. The wall between these two kinds of theological learning, however, is paper-thin.”<sup>6</sup> Aleshire suggests that an MA Academic degree may not be adequate<sup>7</sup> to prepare a student for ministry. “Not only does practice require different intellectual effort, some indicators suggest that it requires multiple kinds of intellectual effort, and the difference between superior and inferior pastoral work is that good pastors combine social, emotional, and intellectual patterns of intelligence in the practices of effective pastoral leadership. Professionally focused education seeks to attend to all the ways that ministerial practitioners need to learn.”<sup>8</sup>

What does it mean when students pursue a degree for purposes other than those intended by an institution? Are institutional learning goals connected to a vocational trajectory? Are the standards of accreditation, particularly the degree standards, tied to vocational trajectories? The standards do seem to presume such end goals. Does this mean that theological schools need to steer students pursuing ministry away from MA Academic degrees?

Perhaps, more significantly, the number of students using the MA Academic degree to prepare for ministry suggests that some students may no longer feel that the MDiv is the best preparation for such a role. Theological schools are no longer the perceived experts when it comes to many of

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5 Ibid., 40.

6 Ibid., 41.

7 Ibid., 43.

8 Ibid.

the practices associated with ministry. Students feel they can go elsewhere for training in preaching, teaching, and leadership that is more relevant and often cheaper than seminary tuition.

Maybe theological schools are not connecting their teaching to the current contexts in which students are serving. They are leaving students to do the translation and integration work that will allow them to apply what they are learning to their ministry contexts. So, rather than enrolling in longer degrees that emphasize professional ministry, they opt for academic degrees and do their integrative work outside the seminary context.

Such a disconnect between the purposes of students and the stated purposes of institutions regarding the MA Academic degree suggests a need to rethink how that degree is defined and what learning goals are associated with the degree. It also suggests a need to rethink how theological education understands its role in preparing ministers, particularly those who bring with them a wealth of experience.

## **Theological school for personal learning**

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In *Earthen Vessels*, Aleshire suggests that, in addition to preparing students for professional ministry or academic mastery, a third use was emerging: personal enrichment.<sup>9</sup> Data from the GSQ, however, does not reveal such a trend, at least not among ATS schools located in the United States. In fact, of the 174 schools that used the GSQ from 2013 to 2016, only 20 schools (11%) had 10% or more of their graduates indicate that they attended seminary for personal enrichment. Fourteen of those 20 schools were located in Canada.

From 2013 to 2016, there were 960 graduates who reported that they “earned the degree for personal enrichment.” A majority of these graduates were distributed among various master’s degrees, including 45% who completed an MA Academic degree, 17% who completed the MDiv degree, and 16% who completed the MA Professional degree.

It is possible that the GSQ is simply not capturing the students who attend seminary for personal enrichment. Data from the questionnaire is underrepresented in terms of part-time, non-residential, and older students who are not enrolled in degree programs. However, it is also

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9 Ibid., 9.

possible that the economic downturn of 2008 made attending seminary for personal enrichment unaffordable for many potential students. Data from the questionnaires suggest, however, that most students attend seminary for some particular purpose, whether an opportunity to study, intellectual interest, or the desire to serve.

When asked to rank various influences on their decisions to attend theological school, entering students ranked the following five factors highest on a scale of 1 to 5.

Top Five Answers	
Experienced a call from God	4.4
Opportunity for study and growth	4.4
Desire to serve others	4.4
Intellectual interest in religious/theological questions	4.2
Desire to make a difference in life of church	4.2

Reasons such as “promise of spiritual fulfillment” or “search for meaning in life” appeared much lower on the list. It could be that students attend seminary for personal enrichment, but it is a particular kind of personal enrichment connected to intellectual interests or the desire to make a difference in the life of the church.

### **Do these students actually go into ministry?**

While GSQ data provide information about where graduates anticipate serving, the Alumni/ae Questionnaire (AQ) provides data as to where they actually end up working. In 2017, ATS completed a large survey of alumni/ae from a representative sample of ATS member schools as part of the Educational Models and Practices project. The survey was sent to students who graduated in 2011 and 2015, and it reflects the jobs they held in early 2017. Data from the 42 participating schools and more than 940 alumni/ae provided insights as to where our graduates are serving.

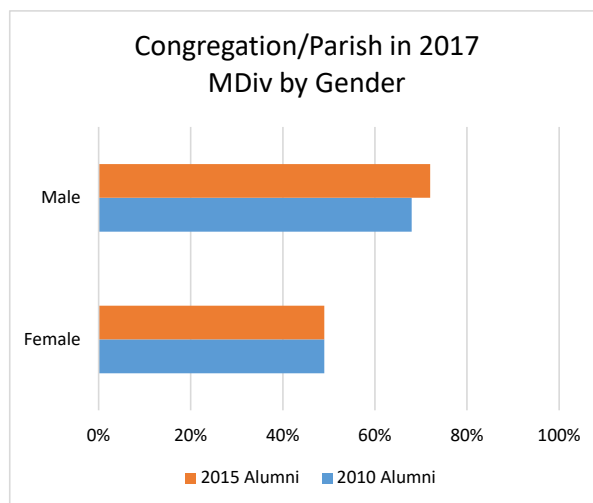
Just over half (52%) of the alumni/ae reported that they were currently working in a congregation or parish in 2017. Among MDiv graduates, that number increased to 63%. This percentage was lower than the 71% of 2017 students responding to the GSQ who anticipated serving in a congregation

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or parish setting at graduation. Percentages for male and female MDiv alumni/ae serving in congregational ministry were also lower than among their counterparts at graduation.

	2017 Graduating Student Questionnaire	2017 Alumni/ae Questionnaire
All MDiv Students	71%	63%
Male MDiv Graduates	77%	70%
Female MDiv Graduates	61%	49%

As the chart indicates, more students anticipate going into congregational ministry at graduation than actually end up serving in those positions one to five years out of seminary. Possibly the most striking difference is among female students. Female students enter seminary less likely to plan on going into congregational ministry (49%). During seminary, they are more likely to change their career trajectories and by graduation 61% plan on congregational ministry. However, only 49% actually end up in congregations during their first five years out of seminary. Are seminaries preparing women for ministry positions that don't exist? Or for congregations that are not prepared to receive them? It is not simply an issue of not finding placement right after seminary. Comparing alumni/ae from 2010 and 2015 shows that while male graduates are more likely to move into congregational ministry five years after graduation, there is no similar change among female graduates.





## Where are the graduates who do not serve in congregations?

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Theological schools still primarily train students for pastoral ministry in a congregation and for teaching. However, the number of entering students pursuing other positions has increased from 10% to 17% in the last 10 years. Where are these students serving?

The ESQ gives us little insight into the other vocational goals students plan to pursue. In fact, when tracing the vocational goals of entering students from 1996 to 2016, one is struck by how little has changed in the last 20 years. With few exceptions, the proportion of students pursuing various vocational goals has only changed two or three percentage points. The greatest changes are seen in the following two categories: Other (4% increase) and Other teaching or administration in higher education (4% decrease).

Changes in vocational goals over the last two decades did not differ greatly based on gender and/or marital status with the following exceptions:

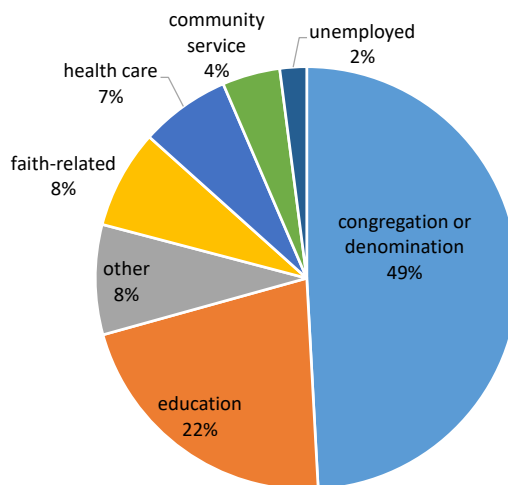
- While the percentage of students planning on teaching or administration in higher education dropped by 4% from 1996 to 2016, the drop was greater among male students (-5%) than among female students (-1%).
- From 1996 to 2016, the percentage of female students planning on becoming a pastor, priest or minister dropped by 5%, while the percentage of male students increased by 4%. The greatest decreases were among married women (-7%).

Again, our data point to changes in the vocational goals traditionally associated with theological education, but what about those pursuing other vocational goals?

The alumni/ae survey completed in 2017 expanded on the existing AQ and asked students to provide their job titles as well as the names of the organizations where they were serving. Those titles were coded to give us a better idea of where alumni/ae were serving in the first five years after graduation.

## *Shifting Vocational Identity in Theological Education*

A majority of alumni/ae were serving in congregational or denominational contexts (49%) or educational settings (22%). The remaining alumni/ae served in faith-related organizations (8%), healthcare settings (7%) most often as chaplains, and community service organizations (4%). The largest group, however, served in settings that could only be categorized as “other.”



Similar data were found in the GSQ. Graduates from 2014 to 2017 not serving in congregational settings were most likely to serve in faith-based organizations, but a large percentage were serving in “other” settings. MDiv students not serving in congregations were most likely to serve in faith-based ministries. MA Academics and MA Professionals were more likely to serve in faith-based ministries, nonprofits, and “other” settings.

	MDiv	MA Academic/ ThM	MA Professional	DMin	Other
Faith-based	47%	19%	32%	48%	24%
Education	20%	36%	16%	22%	14%
Nonprofit	8%	11%	22%	8%	22%
For Profit	3%	6%	2%	1%	5%
Other	11%	17%	20%	15%	27%
Undecided	10%	11%	8%	6%	9%

## **Conclusion**

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For many years, it has been clear that the nature of ministry, religion, and their relationships to theological education in the United States and Canada have been changing. With the millennial generation entering the workforce, ministry has been redefined outside of traditional institutions. The gig economy, combined with the decline in the economic vitality of congregations, has increased the number of bi-vocational pastors. The rise of the religiously unaffiliated spiritual seekers has led to an increase in those pursuing theology for personal enrichment.

Amidst all these changes, however, theological education still seems to be forming most students for traditional congregational ministry—at least those are the students who are being captured in the ATS Student Questionnaires. And if the data are even partially correct, those are the students who are being attracted to theological schools. A majority of students arrive with a commitment to congregational ministry that only deepens while they are in seminary—a commitment that, for some, cannot be sustained after graduation whether due to lack of placement opportunities or for some other reason.

Not only are theological schools struggling to reach these new emerging forms of ministry leaders and spiritual seekers, but they are even seeing a decline in students pursuing one of the major goals of theological education—academic mastery for the purpose of teaching.

For some, this continued commitment to congregational ministry is a positive sign that theological schools are remaining committed to their purposes and missions. For others, this commitment indicates a lack of understanding of the current landscape of ministry in the United States and Canada.

When schools do reach into these new emerging markets, they often do so outside of the traditional curriculum, outside of master's or doctoral degrees, or outside of the programs addressed in the ATS Standards of Accreditation. Even within the current degree structures, students are challenging the very definitions of the degrees and using—especially the academic MA programs—in ways not addressed by the Standards.

The ATS Student Questionnaires are—at the moment—highlighting some of the limits of our current form of graduate theological education, but they are also beginning to provide some insight into how we might move forward. Students are challenging us to think deeply about

## *Shifting Vocational Identity in Theological Education*

the purpose of theological education for someone who brings a wealth of ministry experience. They are challenging us to think of the forms of theological education that can best prepare bi-vocational ministers, forms that can in and of themselves be part of the education process. And they are reminding us of the effectiveness theological education has in shaping the vocational trajectory of students, challenging us to point those trajectories not toward ministry as it was in the past but rather as it will be in the future.

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# Embracing Diversity: Two Models of Faculty Engagement

*Deborah H. C. Gin*

*The Association of Theological Schools*

*ABSTRACT: This article reports findings from an in-depth survey of ATS faculty and discusses two models that emerged to explain how faculty come to engage multicultural education. The two models have considerable overlap but several important distinctive factors: unique to the model for faculty of color are epistemological awareness and self-efficacy and to the model for white faculty are graduate school socialization and institutional factors. The article concludes with a discussion on the ways schools can change institutional structures, develop faculty, and nuance hiring practices, in light of these findings.*

## Introduction

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The Association of Theological Schools (ATS), through its Committee on Race and Ethnicity (CORE) and consultants, staff, and member institutions, has made significant progress in its work on race since it began giving focused attention to diversity in the 2000s. The Association's work with minoritized constituents, however, began in 1978, with the efforts of its Committee on Underrepresented Constituencies (URC).<sup>1</sup>

Daniel Aleshire was associate director for accreditation during the early work of the URC and became executive director shortly before CORE was established. In short, the work of CORE—including important topics it addressed, such as white privilege and hiring for racial/ethnic faculty representation—was entirely under Dan's watch. As this article discusses, these issues remain key to moving the work of diversity inclusivity

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1 For more on the history of ATS work with race and ethnicity, see Janice Edwards-Armstrong and Eliza Smith Brown, "Committee on Race and Ethnicity completes 15 years of work," *Colloquy Online*, January/February 2016; see also Janice Edwards-Armstrong, "CORE: An Evolving Issue," *Theological Education* 45, no. 1 (2009).

forward.<sup>2</sup> Having personally been a participant in several of the events sponsored by CORE and having worked with Dan for three years, I had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the important outcomes of the Association's efforts and Dan's commitments. Dan consistently took a posture of humility in this work, seeking counsel from conversation partners such as Peter Cha, Janice Edwards-Armstrong, Marsha Foster-Boyd, Raul Gomez, Justo González, Willie Jennings, John Kinney, Stephen Lewis, David Maldonado, Alton Pollard, Lester Ruiz, Emilie Townes, and others to guide his understanding and make critical decisions when they were difficult to make. As an organization that attends to many diversities (e.g., race, gender, ecclesial family, country) and their intersections, ATS engages in work that is precious but delicate. Dan knew this in his soul and often regretted that he could not do more. He fully supported the research<sup>3</sup> from which this report comes, and I am honored to include excerpted findings in his festschrift.

### **What this chapter addresses**

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Through its Committee on Race and Ethnicity, the Association coordinated three cycles of work during a 15-year period, from 2000 to 2015: (1) nurturing racial/ethnic faculty and administrators, (2) building informational capacity, and (3) building institutional capacity through strategic diversity planning. Nurturing of individual faculty and administrators and strengthening institutional capacity to address diversity has yielded good fruit. However, much work remains.

Focusing on individual nurture and institutional capacity has had good, albeit limited, impact on institutional change toward promoting

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2 "Diversity inclusivity" is a term used by Thomas F. Nelson-Laird in his framework to evaluate the extent to which diversity is engaged in college courses. I use it in this article as a term that comprises the various subfocuses of an institution's multicultural activity. See Thomas F. Nelson-Laird, "Measuring the diversity inclusivity of college courses," *Research in Higher Education* 52, no. 6 (2011): 572–588. doi:10.1007/s11162-010-9210-3; see also Thomas F. Nelson-Laird and M. E. Engberg, "Establishing differences between diversity requirements and other courses with varying degrees of diversity inclusivity," *The Journal of General Education* 60, no. 2 (2011): 117–137.

3 For additional findings from the larger project, see Deborah H. C. Gin, "Does Our Understanding Lack Complexity? Faculty Perceptions on Multicultural Education," *Theological Education* 48, no. 1 (2013): 47–67.

diversity on campuses; however, gaps still exist in schools' efforts for cultural competence, inclusivity, equity, and many other subfoci of diversity advocacy espoused by schools' missions. Institutional change related to diversity advocacy, for example, is perceived differently based on race.<sup>4</sup> This project's findings additionally show that faculty engage

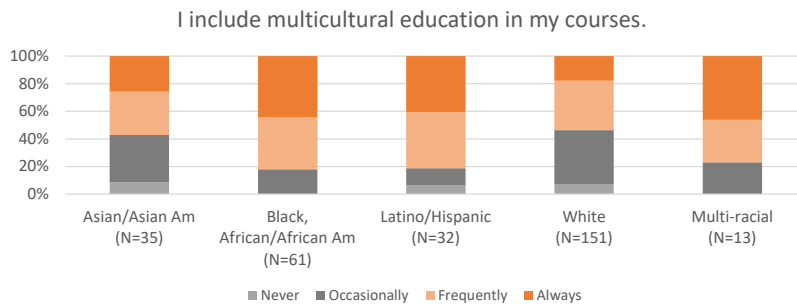


Figure 1: Percentage of faculty who include multicultural education in their courses, by race

multicultural education with differing frequency, by race (see Figure 1).<sup>5</sup> The remaining gaps beg certain questions. Might focusing on dimensions beyond individual nurture and institutional change aid schools in the process of becoming more inclusive? A focus on the professional development of faculty or a focus on the interactions faculty have, perhaps? What is the model that best accounts for how faculty come to engage diversity in the classroom? What factors make up that model? What combination of personal characteristics, institutional capacities, professional cultures, or interactional habits comprise that model? Finally, is one model adequate to describe the process toward diversity engagement in the classroom?

This article reports findings from an in-depth survey of ATS faculty—their pedagogical habits, personal perspectives, professional experiences, institutional contexts, and patterns of interaction—and discusses implications of two models of faculty engagement around multicultural education. While the findings do not fill all the gaps, they bring us closer to understanding what faculty and schools need in order to become more diversity inclusive.

4 Daniel O. Aleshire, Deborah H. C. Gin, and Willie James Jennings, "ATS Work through the Committee on Race and Ethnicity, 2000–2014," *Theological Education* 50, no. 2 (2017): 21–46.

5 Differences were statistically significant at the .01 level ( $\chi^2 = 31.352$ ,  $df = 12$ ).

## The ATS context

The diversity literature abounds with studies that highlight various personal, professional, interactional, and institutional characteristics that account for faculty engagement with multicultural education in their courses. Figure 2 shows examples in each category.<sup>6</sup>

Personal	Professional	Interactional	Institutional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal development</li> <li>• Diversity training beyond what is required</li> <li>• Easy access to diversity resources</li> <li>• Cognitive language base to describe diversity issues</li> <li>• Having a diversity mentor</li> <li>• Social-constructivist pedagogy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discipline</li> <li>• Rank</li> <li>• Time in academe</li> <li>• Disciplinary culture toward diversity</li> <li>• Grad school socialization to see faculty role as diversity engager</li> <li>• Sense of self-agency for diversity inclusivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serious conversations with colleagues of different race</li> <li>• Regular discussions with colleagues about diversity</li> <li>• Opportunities to try out newly learned language of diversity discourse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Size of institution</li> <li>• Promotion/tenure system that values diversity</li> <li>• Hiring practices that target underrepresented communities</li> <li>• % Faculty of color</li> <li>• % Students of color</li> <li>• Diversity component required for each course</li> </ul>

Figure 2: Select variables associated with faculty engagement in diversity inclusivity from research literature

When advocating for diversity, many academics in higher education focus on representation: how many faculty and students of color do we have, and do these figures adequately represent general higher education, the church, or broader US society?<sup>7</sup> Representation and numeric parity are critical to moving the conversation forward, as will be discussed, but other institutional characteristics must also be considered. Retention of faculty and students of color, and the climates that bolster retention, are also important, for example. Curricular issues, such as multicultural education that is integrated in student learning outcomes or other aspects of a course, are also salient. Promotion or tenure systems that value diversity engagement are vital for building institutional capacity for diversity. Having an office of diversity or chief diversity officer, hiring practices that value diversity,

6 An in-depth review of literature, cataloguing salient variables in each of these four dimensions, is forthcoming. It will be a valuable tool for schools, their administrators, and faculty as they determine which model would be most efficacious for their contexts.

7 While ATS is a binational organization, Canada's narratives on race/ethnicity differ from those of the United States. This study was therefore limited to faculty at ATS schools in the United States.



and the presence of upper-level administrators who champion diversity are additionally all related to diversity inclusivity. But which of these, or others, are the most important factors that yield multicultural education engagement in the world of theological education? And how are the factors related?

Figures 3 through 5 show ATS representational figures (students and faculty, over the past three decades.<sup>8</sup> The figures illustrate that certain racial/ethnic constituencies have grown steadily in number since the 1990s. They also show that racial/ethnic students now represent 40% of the total student enrollment; racial/ethnic faculty represent 20% of total full-time faculty; and racial/ethnic administrators, 13% of that group. These figures provide context for the discussion of the following models.

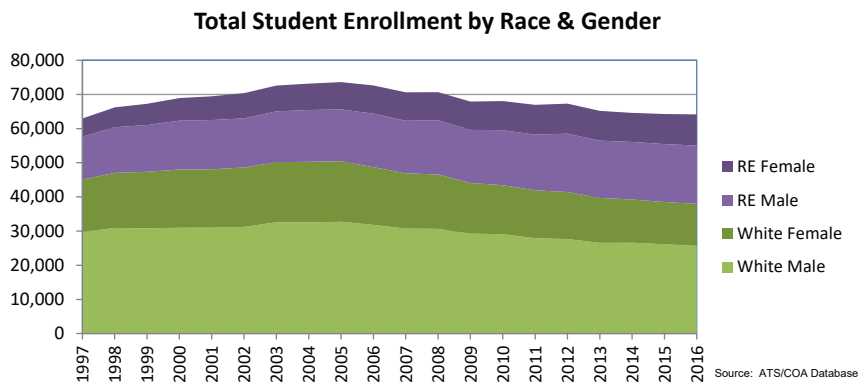


Figure 3: Total student enrollment by race and gender, 1997–2016

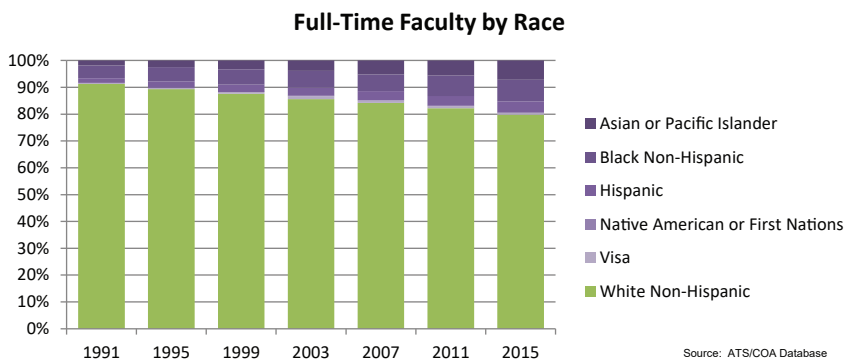


Figure 4: Full-time faculty by race and gender, 1991–2015

<sup>8</sup> ATS administrator data were not collected consistently before a database overhaul in 2007.

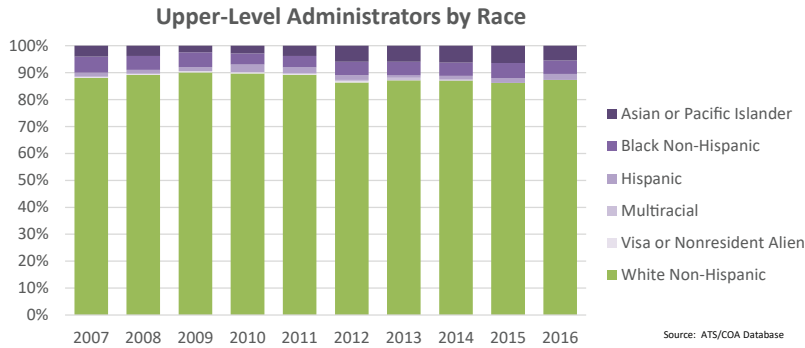


Figure 5: Upper-level administrators (CEO, CAO) by race, 2007–2016

## Models of faculty engagement

### Direct predictors of engagement

As indicated earlier, a variety of factors could account for faculty engagement with diversity in their courses. These can be divided into four high-level categories: personal, institutional, professional, and interactional (see Figure 2). This study considered more than 70 possible factors and analyzed 26 of these for this article.<sup>9</sup> For theological educators, not all factors make a difference.

Certain expected factors do *not* predict engagement directly, such as race of the individual faculty or the institution’s representation of faculty of color. In other words, being faculty of color does not mean someone will engage multicultural engagement in the classroom; similarly, having a higher representation of faculty of color at a school does not directly forecast greater multicultural engagement. However, race and racial parity are important factors for *models* of diversity inclusivity, as will be discussed below.

What combination of factors—personal, professional, interactional, and institutional—do predict engagement with multicultural education? Which faculty are the most likely to engage this work in the classroom?

<sup>9</sup> For full list of variables in the study, as well as “before” and “after” diagrams, path coefficients, and decompositions, contact author.

Figure 6 lists the eight factors that were found to predict engagement directly:

Personal	Professional	Interactional	Institutional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Constructivist Pedagogy</li> <li>• My Responsibility</li> <li>• Epistemology</li> <li>• Personal Development</li> <li>• Diversity Training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Efficacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diverse Conversations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversity requirement for each course</li> </ul>

Figure 6: Predictors of engagement with multicultural education, by category

The faculty who would most likely engage multicultural education in the classroom are the social constructivists who believe diversity inclusivity is their responsibility; who recognize the power in determining what counts as knowledge; who engage in personal development around various aspects of diversity and have participated in diversity training beyond what was required; who feel prepared to teach to diverse populations; who engage in conversations about race with colleagues; and whose schools require a diversity element in *every* course. I describe the factors below and follow these with a discussion on three models.

### Personal characteristics

Five of the eight factors that predict engagement fall within the dimension of personal characteristics. The prevalence of personal factors does not necessarily mean that professional, interactional, or institutional factors are unimportant, as the study included many more items relating to the personal dimension than those of the other dimensions. The relative lack of salient factors in the other realms may also indicate the complexity of gathering non-personal information in survey form. The five personal factors are described below.

*My Responsibility* is a single survey item about the belief that it is the theological educator's responsibility to teach inclusivity; this is in contrast to another item about responsibility that is more externally focused but never predicted (i.e., it is *theological education's* responsibility).

*Epistemology* is a factor comprising two survey items that gather the individuals' reflections on how their courses' values, ethos, and norms are dis/empowering for certain students and that address the analysis of classroom policy and practice from non-mainstream perspectives.

*Personal Development* focuses on personal initiative and habits of diversity consciousness or awareness-raising and is a composite factor consisting of the following survey items:

- I have explored in depth the development of my racial identity.
- I regularly participate in research on diversity.
- I have had prior experiences with multicultural education (e.g., teaching/taking a course on race).
- I regularly engage in learning about diversity in my personal or social activities.
- I regularly engage in reading about diversity.

*Social Constructivist*<sup>10</sup> reflects a pedagogical approach to learning, where students and instructors learn from one another or determine content or assignments together; it is represented by a single survey item.

*Diversity Training* highlights both the commitment to participate in educational programs on diversity beyond what is required and the scope of topics (e.g., racial identity development, white privilege, theoretical frameworks for multicultural education) addressed in diversity workshops; it is a two-item survey factor.

### **Institutional characteristics**

The larger study included a number of institutional characteristics organized around mission and ethos, policies that value multicultural education/diversity, infrastructure (e.g., having a formalized office of diversity or chief diversity officer) that promotes diversity engagement, institutional curriculum and scope, and institutional demographics. The only item that directly predicts faculty engagement is *Diversity Each Course*.

*Diversity Each Course* is a single item that asks whether the institution where the faculty is employed requires multicultural/diversity components in each course; this is in contrast to another item (which was not salient in any analysis)—whether the institution had a single, required course on diversity.

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10 An article with more discussion on social constructivist and other pedagogies is under review with *Teaching Theology & Religion* (Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion).

### **Professional characteristics**

Professional characteristics is one of two categories that ATS has not yet addressed in its work with race and ethnicity. In the larger study, I included aspects related to disciplinary area, pre-professional socialization to see this kind of engagement as part of an educator or scholar identity, departmental commitment for multicultural education, and sense of self-efficacy. Only *Self-Efficacy* emerged as directly salient; however, additional nuances of this dimension emerge by race.

*Self-Efficacy* refers to the faculty's sense of preparation to teach classes with diverse student populations, sense of agency to engage in diversity inclusivity (e.g., that the educator's actions will make a difference), and having confidence to teach students well; it is a three-item composite factor.

### **Interactional characteristics**

The second category that ATS has yet to undertake is interactional characteristics. The dimension includes quantity and quality of interactions with diverse others, regular interactions with colleagues of a different race/ethnicity, and having the belief that diversity is best understood in interactions with people different from one's self, among others. Writing about diversity engagement among students, only a handful of researchers in higher education have addressed this dimension in their work, but they are among the most important voices in the conversation.<sup>11</sup> Some scholars

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11 R. M. Carini, and G. D. Kuh, "Tomorrow's teachers: Do they engage in the 'right things' during college?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, 84, no. 5 (2003): 391; P. Gurin, selections from "The compelling need for diversity in higher education: Reports in defense of the University of Michigan," *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 32, no. 2 (1999): 36–62; S. Hurtado, "Linking diversity and educational purpose: How diversity affects the classroom environment and student development," in G. Orfield and M. Kurlaender (eds.), "Diversity challenged: Evidence on the impact of affirmative action," *Harvard Educational Review* (Cambridge, 2001): 187–203; P. Marin, "The educational possibility of multi-racial/multi-ethnic college classrooms," in G. Maruyama, J. F. Moreno, R. H. Gudeman, and P. Marin (eds.), "Does diversity make a difference? Three research studies on diversity in college classrooms," American Council on Education; American Association of University Professors (Washington, DC, 2000): 61–83. See <http://www.acenet.edu>, or <http://www.aaup.org>; B. D. Tatum, "Talking about race, learning about racism: The application of racial identity development theory in the classroom," in J. Bobo, C. Hudley, and C. Michel (eds.), *The Black Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 389–411; P. D. Umbach, "The contribution of faculty of color to undergraduate education," *Research in Higher Education* 47, no. 3 (2006): 317–345, doi:10.1007/s11162-005-9391-3.

in higher education go as far as to argue that interaction is more important than curriculum, as a pedagogical tool, for developing a commitment to diversity. This study explored this understanding and expanded it to faculty. The one composite factor studied in this project was found to matter for engagement.

*Diverse Conversations* considers both the conversations faculty have with colleagues of different racial backgrounds and conversations they have with any colleague about the topic of diversity or multicultural education; this composite factor also includes report of whether the faculty can find opportunities to try out newly acquired social language of diversity or multicultural discourse with peers or mentors.

While these eight factors were identified as predictive of faculty engagement in general, I also found that the path<sup>12</sup> to these factors differs by the faculty's race. The model that explains white faculty's engagement looks quite different from the model of engagement for faculty of color.

### **Model for white faculty<sup>13</sup>**

For white faculty, multicultural engagement is most strongly related to four factors: *Personal Development*, *Diverse Conversations*, *Diversity Training*, and *Diversity Mentor* (in red, Figure 7). Explanations of the first three were previously provided. The fourth is represented by a single survey item:

*Diversity Mentor*: I regularly connect with someone I trust who gives me feedback on how I can grow in racial awareness.

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12 In order to develop the respective models, I conducted path analyses for this article. Readers are reminded that causality cannot be concluded in regression analysis; prediction does not equal causation. However, with path analysis, causation (and direction of cause-effect) is assumed. Consequently, in discussion of these models, I use directional language. While additional path analyses are needed before final conclusions about the models' fit can be made, these preliminary findings will provide readers with concrete information to compare to life experiences. "Before" and "after" diagrams, path coefficients, and decompositions have been omitted for better readability for the intended audience. Contact author for more information.

13 I recognize this model does not apply to all white faculty (nor the second model to all faculty of color). However, the regression data do unearth patterns of responses, based on race, and are worth considering as to whether they apply in your particular institutional context.

How these four factors interact and how they interact with additional salient factors in the model is particularly interesting. Figure 7 diagrams the model, beginning with the inputs to these factors, how they influence one another, and how they lead to the ultimate goal of engaging multicultural education in the classroom. Two additional descriptions will aid in understanding the model.

**Diversity Resources:** I have easy access to diversity/multicultural sources (e.g., guest speakers, racial/ethnic community networks).

**Diversity Language:** I have a cognitive base (i.e., vocabulary/concepts) to describe diversity/multicultural issues.

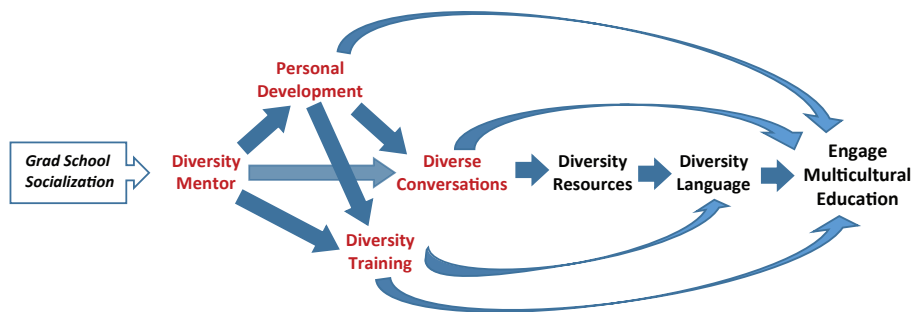


Figure 7: Diagram of Model for White Faculty Engagement with Multicultural Education

The model indicates there are many routes to the ultimate goal of engagement. For example, having a diversity mentor leads to better personal development related to race and other multicultural issues, which produces the goal. Another route might be that the presence of a diversity mentor causes better participation in diversity training (beyond what is required—see description above), which leads to the ultimate goal. Both these routes are well known in higher education and theological education.

What is less known, perhaps, is the route that leads through increased diverse conversations (both on topics related to diversity with any colleague and on any topic with colleagues different from self), from the interactional dimension. More of such conversations, then, leads to gaining better diversity resources, which causes an increase in the language to talk about diversity, finally culminating in further engagement in the classroom.

Note, also, the role of the socialization that occurs in graduate school. The item is stated in the survey this way:

**Graduate School Socialization:** In graduate school/seminary, I was socialized to see engaging in multicultural pedagogy as part of my identity as a scholar/educator.

Though the connections are not drawn in Figure 7 for the sake of simplifying the diagram, such socialization has an impact on several factors: having a diversity mentor, participation in personal development, engaging in diverse conversations, and having diversity language. Most interestingly, *Graduate School Socialization* is only important for white faculty. It does not show up as salient for faculty of color.

### Model for faculty of color

For faculty of color, multicultural engagement is most strongly related to four factors: *Personal Development*, *Self-Efficacy*, *Diversity Language*, and *Epistemology* (in red, Figure 8). All four have been described earlier and their relationships are diagrammed in Figure 8. The model includes other salient factors in addition to these four, which are discussed below.

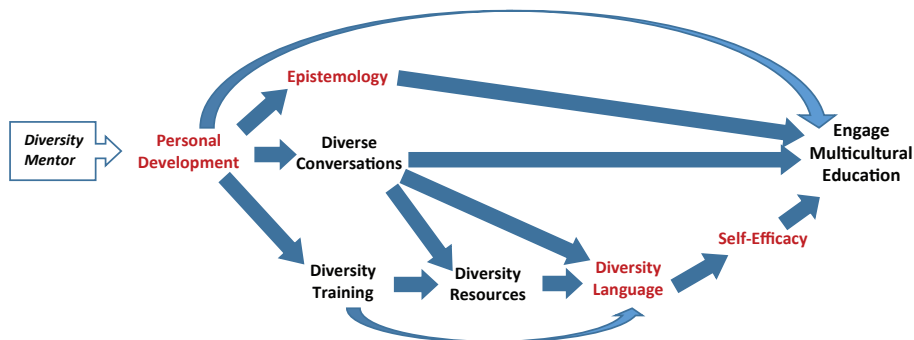


Figure 8: Diagram of Model for Faculty of Color Engagement with Multicultural Education

As with the model for white faculty, there are many routes to the ultimate goal of multicultural engagement. Similar to the model described above, better personal development causes increased participation in diversity training. However, unlike the first model, participation in diversity training is not directly related to engaging diversity in the classroom for faculty of color. The reasons for this difference were not explored in the study, and many undoubtedly exist (e.g., current diversity training modules are not relevant for faculty of color in the same ways they are for white faculty, the role that faculty of color play in diversity workshops is different than



the role white faculty play). However, diversity training has an indirect impact on multicultural engagement for faculty of color; this is through the diversity language and subsequent increased sense of self-efficacy that are rooted in participating in diversity training. And while the connections were removed to simplify the diagram, having a diversity mentor has an impact on multiple factors in the model: it increases participation in personal development (as already discussed), enhances an understanding of non-dominant epistemologies, and fosters involvement in diversity training, all of which indirectly boost engagement in multicultural education.

It is important to note that while issues of diversity and multicultural education are part of the lived experience for all faculty of color, not all are scholars in the discipline. Placing responsibility for the school's "diversity thing" on faculty of color is akin to taxing these faculty for their "of color" status; preparing to champion diversity on behalf of the school takes away from energy and resources that could be spent on their primary fields of study. To do this—especially, without the resources, training, language, or mentors needed for preparation—is tantamount to a double tax.

### **Impact of racial parity**

As previously mentioned, addressing the racial representation of the school's students, faculty, and high-level administrators is only one aspect of attending to diversity issues institutionally. Other structural elements, such as recruitment and retention, climate and intergroup relations, faculty scholarship, and mission and identity, contribute to enhanced diversity inclusivity.<sup>14</sup>

Findings from this study, however, do indicate that representation remains a critical component for faculty engagement in multicultural education, particularly for white faculty. Figure 9 shows the model of engagement for white faculty (see Figure 7), with an additional layer, indicated by the orange arrows. The survey items comprising each factor in this layer were stated as in the following:

*Theological Mission Statement:* My institution has a theologically based mission/positional statement on diversity.

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14 D. G. Smith, *Diversity's Promise for Higher Education: Making it Work* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

**Committed Leaders:** My institution's upper-level leaders are committed to multicultural education/diversity.

**Hiring:** My institution's faculty search process promotes the hiring of faculty from underrepresented groups.

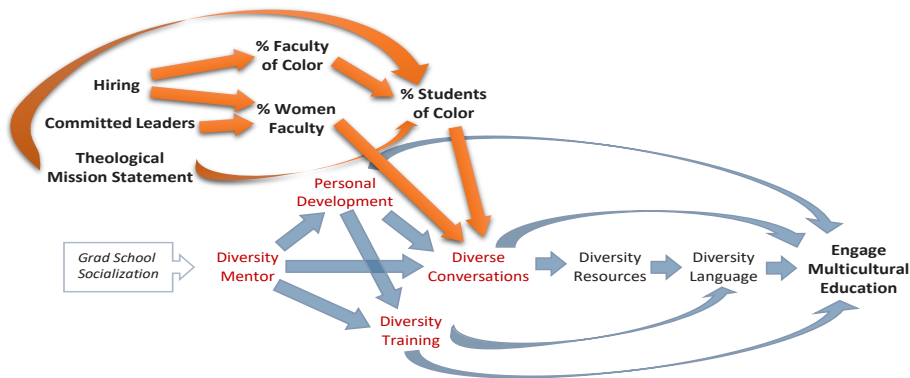


Figure 9: Diagram of Complete Model for White Faculty Engagement with Multicultural Education

This additional segment illustrates how various institutional elements influence one another in this model. Practices that promote hiring from underrepresented groups, for example, cause an increased representation of faculty of color, then an increased representation of students of color, which leads to more diverse conversations, ultimately leading to increased multicultural engagement. Having upper-level leaders who are committed to diversity inclusivity causes an increase in the percentage of women faculty, which affects diverse conversations, and so on. In other words, though racial parity does not have a direct impact on diversity engagement in the classroom, it influences the extent and the type of conversations in which the school's faculty participate that eventually increases multicultural engagement in the classroom.

It was an intriguing finding that this was not the model for faculty of color (see Figure 8). In fact, for the latter model, no factors in the institutional dimension, except for one (smaller size of institution), weakly, were found to matter. Again, the study did not explore why. Perhaps faculty of color are more internally motivated? Or maybe it is that institutional factors affect white faculty in ways that they don't affect faculty of color? At minimum, the findings indicate that the path to engaging in multicultural education is different for faculty, based on racial grouping.

In sum, though race and racial representation did not seem to matter initially in terms of which faculty would be more likely to engage diversity in the classroom, it appears that the route to engagement is different for white faculty and for faculty of color. For both groups, personal development, diversity training, and diverse conversations are important. For faculty of color, the professional dimension factor of self-efficacy further explains engagement. For white faculty, institutional elements, leading to racial and gender representation, as well as preprofessional socialization are additionally salient.

## **Implications/recommendations**

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What does it matter that the routes to engaging diversity inclusivity differ by race? At the most superficial, this knowledge will help schools better focus their efforts. In an era of theological education where “one size does not fit all,” it is important to recognize that one approach to diversity inclusivity also does not fit all. This does not mean, however, that some schools can be excused because they do not value multicultural education, diversity, equity, or excellence. Indeed, all schools must attend to issues of diversity, if only to be better prepared for an impending future. Rather, what this means is that approaches to this work must take into consideration the school’s context. Who make up the faculty? What institutional structures already exist? What is the organizational culture of the school? Who in the school holds power? Answers to these questions form the starting point of a school’s work in becoming more diversity inclusive.

This article’s findings speak to at least three faculty and institutional practices, and I offer a few reflections on each.

### **What to consider institutionally**

Racial representation continues to surface as an essential factor in this work. As a whole, ATS is not yet there. Faculty racial composition is far from reaching student racial composition, and cabinet-level administrator racial composition does not yet reflect faculty racial composition. These statements, of course, assume a definition of parity. Schools must first determine their aspirational goals in terms of representation of persons of color: Should they reflect theological education, higher education, a particular constituency (e.g., students), the church in North America, broader

society, current numbers, or the future? And how does this relate to the school's mission? Naming the goal begins the process, but keeping in mind why representation matters sustains the work. This study showed that, at least for white faculty engagement, proportions of women faculty, of faculty of color, and of students of color *matter*: the higher the proportion, the greater the diverse conversations and, ultimately, the increased likelihood for faculty engagement of this work in the classroom.

Also important are the school's structures. The findings indicate that when a school requires diversity components in each course, has a theologically based mission statement addressing diversity, and has appointed upper-level leaders committed to equity and excellence, these conditions predict faculty engagement with multicultural education in their courses.

### **What to consider when advocating for faculty**

Faculty are often named as the primary resisters of change, including transforming organizational culture toward diversity inclusivity. I would argue that a key reason for any resistance, by any person, is not feeling prepared. Self-efficacy (i.e., confidence, sense that actions will make a difference) surfaced as part of the model of engagement for faculty of color, but having diversity resources and diversity language were salient in both models. If white faculty and faculty of color have easy access to diversity resources and if they are familiar with the vocabulary and concepts to describe multicultural issues, then they are more likely to engage the work in the classroom.

Those in charge of professionally developing faculty, then, would do well to consider diversity training that immerses faculty in diverse conversations, both on topics of diversity and with people who are from other racial groups. The best diversity training attends to the roles that participants of color and white participants play, continually assessing how well equal-status conditions have been met.<sup>15</sup> This study showed that for white faculty, diversity training directly leads to multicultural engagement in the classroom, but for faculty of color, diversity training leads to increased diversity language and indirectly to multicultural engagement, which may suggest different purposes or functions of such training, by racial group.

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15 Gin, "Does Our Understanding Lack Complexity?"

Remembering that there are at least two different models leading to this engagement will help to mitigate inaccurate expectations of the training.

### **What to consider when hiring**

As previously mentioned in multiple sections, attending to racial representation bolsters a school's forward movement in diversity. However, representation and institutional hiring that is representative builds on many foundational elements: diverse networks of the search committee, pipelines, access, and recruiting mechanisms, to name a few. These are not cultivated overnight.

If hiring someone who is committed to this work is a priority for a school, one strategy to consider in tandem is hiring based on his or her personal and professional activity. For example, in the hiring process, ask about candidates' research areas, their personal development habits, the kinds of conversations they've had and on what topics, the most important things they've learned from mentors, and for what identity their graduate schools socialized them. Find out whether their responses point to either of these models. Building strong networks of allies is often just as important as representation, particularly because allies' voices are often more readily heard above the fray.

### **Concluding reflections**

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This article reported findings from a comprehensive survey of ATS faculty. It explored two new dimensions—professional and interactional—that appear to be salient in an understanding of what causes faculty engagement with multicultural education. Using path analysis, and assuming causality, a model for engagement was explored, but two models emerged to explain how faculty engage this work, with important differences. Unique to the model for faculty of color are epistemological awareness (i.e., critique of mainstream norms about knowledge) and self-efficacy (i.e., a sense that actions will make a difference). For white faculty, graduate school socialization (i.e., toward vocational identity as a multicultural educator) and institutional factors (e.g., racial representation, hiring practices) surfaced as distinctive factors. While other factors are common to both models, the routes (i.e., what leads to what) are not always the same.

Implications of these findings can be drawn for institutional structures, professional development of faculty, and hiring practices. ATS has

*Embracing Diversity: Two Models of Faculty Engagement*

come a long way in its work with race and ethnicity under the leadership of Dan Aleshire; four of his last six hires were persons of color, to name one concrete example of representation. However, many gaps remain, and this important work continues. As Dan often put it, “This is a blessed work to which you can never say you’ve arrived.”

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# The Evolution of Leadership Education at ATS

*Stephen R. Graham*  
*The Association of Theological Schools*

*ABSTRACT: One of the most significant and sustained legacies of Dan Aleshire's leadership of The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) has been its programs in leadership education. While programs of education concerning key issues have been central to the organization's activities since its inception in 1918, it was not until 1988 that Leadership Education was named as one of the Association's core functions. By 2000, Lilly Endowment Inc. had endorsed ATS Leadership Education with its largest single grant to the Association up until that time. This article traces the evolution of programming up to that point and continuing to the present day.*

## Introduction

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The Constitution of the American Association of Theological Schools, now The Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS), had developed by the early 1990s to include four key purposes:

- to provide a continuing forum and entity for its members to confer on matters of common interest
- to consider issues that may arise in the relations of institutions to one another
- to establish standards of accreditation (added in 1936) and
- to promote the improvement of theological education in such ways as it may deem appropriate

According to William Baumgaertner, former associate director of ATS, the fourth purpose provided an opportunity for the Association to develop a range of programs and services, including leadership education.<sup>1</sup> Since that time, with the restructuring of the organization into two

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<sup>1</sup> William L. Baumgaertner, "A Retrospective Study of the Institute for Theological Education Management," *Theological Education* 29, no. 1 (Autumn 1992): 39.

## *The Evolution of Leadership Education at ATS*

corporations, The Association of Theological Schools and the Commission on Accrediting, the work of leadership education is firmly embedded in the Association, whose stated purposes include work to

- (a) promote the enhancement and improvement of theological schools in the United States and Canada and to advocate on behalf of theological education,
- (b) provide a continuing educational forum for administrators and faculty in theological education,
- (c) conduct applied research regarding issues and practices of theological education to contribute to the development of theological education,
- (d) communicate with member schools and the broader public about theological education, and
- (e) provide a continuing venue to convene schools to consider issues regarding theological education, relationships among theological schools, and the relationships of theological schools to other educational institutions, associations, and ecclesiastical and governmental authorities.<sup>2</sup>

At the time of Baumgaertner's reflections on the Association's work in leadership education, the organization's executive committee identified four areas of ATS work:

- accreditation
- leadership education
- efforts to help theological schools study critical issues or develop new skills
- data, publication, and communication about theological education

The leadership education programming of the Association ultimately dates to 1918, when leaders from a group of theological schools gathered to discuss issues regarding theological education. ATS expanded the focus of its work in the 1930s to include accreditation, which enhanced conversation regarding the broader state of theological education in the United States and Canada. ATS continued its two primary areas of work through

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/about-ats/documents/association-bylaws.pdf>, accessed March 5, 2018.



the 1950s, but as the ATS membership began to diversify—first with Roman Catholic schools (primarily in the late 1960s and 1970s), then with a growing number of evangelical Protestant schools (primarily in the 1980s and early 1990s)—the conversation about both theological education and accreditation of theological schools became more complex. ATS responded by reassessing basic issues in theological education in the 1980s, by redeveloping accreditation standards in the first half of the 1990s and with an additional adjustment in 2010 and 2012, by identifying new patterns of service to member schools in the second half of the 1990s, and by launching a comprehensive program of leadership education for theological educators in 2000. ATS has sought to serve theological education through accreditation, educational programs, and services that deal creatively and thoughtfully with critical issues in theological education.<sup>3</sup>

This essay will focus attention on leadership education and address the development of that work in response to the changing work of the schools. The Association and its member schools faced a range of significant changes through the middle decades of the twentieth century. Most significant, perhaps, was the growing professionalization of understandings of the vocation of ministry, and of the organization and work of theological schools. Changes took place across the Association in understandings of the administrative philosophy, personnel, and skills required in ATS schools. As the Association began to analyze the schools, their work, and their leaders, it became clear that there was a need for leadership education, including resources for a number of roles within the schools. Many administrative leaders, for example, had been trained for pastoral or faculty roles and needed a broad range of expertise not included in that training to serve effectively in the increasingly complex institutions of theological education. As historian of theological education Glenn T. Miller wrote,

during the 1970s, seminary administration became increasingly complex. Externally, schools had to manage relations with other schools and increasingly had to relate to publics broader than their own judicatories, if any. This meant an increasing emphasis on public relations and specifically

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<sup>3</sup> This paragraph and others draw upon material in the proposals to Lilly Endowment Inc. for the Leadership Education for Theological Educators in 2005, 2008, 2012, and 2015.

on fundraising. Increasing costs called for more careful monitoring of the school's financial position and increased attention to strategic and short- and long-range planning. Seminary staffs grew, and organizations required more coordination. . . . The days of mom-and-pop operations were over.<sup>4</sup>

## **Beginnings**

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The responses to this need took a number of forms. Indeed, over the years a veritable alphabet soup of acronyms has emerged to represent ATS committees and programming. In the late 1950s, a broad range of "middle management" administrators gathered rather informally in connection with ATS Biennial Meetings. By the 1960s, that gathering had adopted the name "American Association of Seminary Staff Officers" (AASSO), meeting for three days each biennium for more than a decade.<sup>5</sup> The seventh and final meeting of the AASSO took place in 1970, when the organization ceded its work to the Seminary Management Association (SMA), which began to host meetings that included the middle managers as well as chief executive officers and academic officers. During the early 1970s, the SMA sponsored receptions and presentations in conjunction with ATS Biennial Meetings. Also, in non-biennial years the SMA offered "workshops, seminars, and institutes for a broad range of personnel."<sup>6</sup>

As part of its explorations, the SMA sponsored three studies of seminary management, contributing in 1973 to an effort to create a closer relationship to ATS, and a year later to the formation of the ATS Commission on Institutional Administration and Management (CIAM). With funding from a Lilly Endowment grant, the CIAM was charged to offer "one or more workshops each year for a broad range of administrative officers."<sup>7</sup> Emerging from a series of studies of theological schools in the 1970s, the Commission formed the Program for Theological Education

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4 Glenn T. Miller, *Piety and Plurality: Theological Education Since 1960* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014), 54.

5 Baumgaertner, 40.

6 Ibid.

7 Miller, 55; Baumgaertner, 40. In 1978 CIAM was terminated for budgetary reasons.

Management (PTEM). According to Leon Pacala, executive director of ATS from 1980 to 1991,

Measured by the amount of financial resources invested, the number of persons affected, the comprehensiveness of programmatic provisions, and the mode of operation, the ATS Program for Theological Management (PTEM), was the most distinctive and extensive institutional support program of the decade.

In fact, "it was cited by the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation as one of the most notable service programs administered by accrediting agencies in the United States." The purpose of PTEM was to "make accessible to theological school administrators current forms of managerial and administrative training" fashioned to be directly applicable to theological schools. PTEM worked to create an expanding cadre of administrators who embodied a tradition of well-equipped administrators established as peer groups within the Association.<sup>8</sup>

As Baumgaertner wrote,

The SMA continued as a more loosely constituted professional organization, giving way in the early 1980s to the ATS Advisory Committee on Theological Education Management [ACTEM], which had received a specific mandate from the ATS member schools together with significant foundation funding for a series of new programs.

In part, the ATS organization ACTEM succeeded the SMA because of the latter's inability to attain tax-exempt status that would have enabled the pursuit of foundation grants. The limitations placed on SMA made it too difficult for that organization to respond to the widespread need across the Association.<sup>9</sup>

Pacala noted that

the SMA provided a nucleus of persons and a modest tradition of organized concerns for the identity and professional

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8 Leon Pacala, *The Role of ATS in Theological Education, 1980–1990* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 112, 114, 115.

9 Baumgaertner, 40–41.

development of theological school middle managers and specifically of financial development officers. It was the good fortune of ATS to build upon these beginnings and to undertake more comprehensive efforts to address them.<sup>10</sup>

He asserted,

By the beginning of the decade [1980s], it was exceedingly clear that theological schools needed administrators better prepared to meet the mounting financial, managerial, and executive demands of their offices. Yet, no tradition of leadership preparation of this nature existed for theological education.<sup>11</sup>

The Advisory Committee concluded that the Association needed both specialized programs of management training and a plan that would develop a tradition in which seminary leaders were selected on the basis of their training and skills in administration and organizational management.

In considering future needs, a catalyzing event toward the development of the Association's robust leadership education work was an informal gathering in 1975 of several seminary administrators with Robert Lynn, vice president for religion of Lilly Endowment Inc., to discuss the most pressing needs of seminaries. The meeting led to a planning grant of \$60,000 from Lilly Endowment to ATS that funded three studies: an extensive survey in 1980–1981 of the 137 schools and individuals that had received ATS Administrative Development Grants between 1975 and 1979; a study by Jackson W. Carroll of Hartford Seminary to assess ATS programs and services; and a six-month planning phase toward a proposed Institute of Theological Education Management. Surveys conducted by SMA in the early 1970s had brought to attention the need experienced by many seminary chief executive officers for a more extensive and comprehensive program to address their special needs.<sup>12</sup>

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10 Pacala, 121.

11 Pacala, 114.

12 Baumgaertner, 41.

The Autumn 1981 issue of the Association's journal, *Theological Education*, published Carroll's assessment of ATS programs and services.<sup>13</sup> In words that sound remarkably apt in the second decade of the twenty-first century, Pacala reflected on Carroll's study, noting,

Change was the medium in which institutional life was to be conducted, and theological schools no longer were able to take for granted the adequacy of traditional administrative organization, practices, and operations. It was a time in which the future of theological schools needed to be reinvented and adapted to changing times. For this task, leaders were needed who were prepared to discern the futures of their schools and to move them into such futures.<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, some of the key emphases of executive leadership that would continue through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, had been named at the beginning of the twentieth century by John K. McLean, president of Hartford Seminary. McLean posed the question of whether there should be an office of the seminary president, permanent and full-time, with an officer who would provide direction and focus for institutions and who would champion the acquisition of financial resources.<sup>15</sup>

Carroll's study revealed a number of important insights that would shape the Association and its work of leadership education for decades. When asked about their greatest need, responses emerged with the "top ranked theme" of "theological research and scholarship, with particular emphasis on grants for faculty research and assistance to schools in developing their own research funds."<sup>16</sup> The survey also revealed that "high importance" was placed on providing "assistance for CEOs and deans."<sup>17</sup> Whatever programming would be developed, the priority should be on

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13 Jackson W. Carroll, "Project Transition: An Assessment of ATS Programs and Services," *Theological Education* 18, no. 1 (Autumn 1981): 45–165. Respondents to the survey included CEOs 21%; other senior administrators 22%, academic deans 16%; faculty 30%, and board chairs 12%.

14 Pacala, 111–12.

15 Ibid., 104–5.

16 Carroll, 57.

17 Ibid., 119.

“options which promise to build up the whole enterprise” of theological education, rather than support for individuals or even particular schools.<sup>18</sup>

Also instructive was Carroll’s finding that respondents believed that “accreditation should remain the Association’s first priority” and that there existed a vital foundation of a “legacy of goodwill on which ATS can build future programs and services.”<sup>19</sup>

A final reflection also mirrors an ongoing priority for the work of theological schools. Carroll commented on a sociologist author’s considerable surprise at “the relative absence of theological references or religious language among the faculty whom he interviewed regarding their understanding of theological education and their role in it.” Carroll continued that among respondents to his own survey, “there is a belief that ATS has paid too little attention in recent years to a theology (or, perhaps more accurately, theologies) of theological education.”<sup>20</sup>

Prior to these studies and their urging for a more intensive and comprehensive program for chief executive officers, the Association had sponsored a range of shorter seminars for administrative leaders, including

- seminars in 1976, 1977, 1979, and 1981 for chief executive officers;
- seminars for middle management personnel in 1977, 1978, and 1980; and
- in the latter half of 1970s, a series of workshops for senior and middle management administrators.

One development that would significantly advance the Association’s service to the membership by gathering and providing data was the 1969–1970 publication of the ATS *Fact Book on Theological Education*. Initial funding provided by the Andrew Mellon Foundation led to the annual publication of this helpful book through the 2002–2003 academic year, followed by the digital annual data tables first available to members in 2003 and 2004.

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18 Ibid., 141.

19 Ibid., 140, 106.

20 Ibid., 142. Carroll quotes Donald R. Ploch, *Higher Education: Faculty as Professionalization and Change Agents* (Washington: US Office of Education, June 1972), 38ff.

## Chief executive officers

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By the end of the 1970s, many leaders across the Association had come to believe that perhaps the most significant need among theological schools was leadership development for chief executive officers. Most schools lacked institutional resources for leadership development, and many observers lamented the relatively rapid turnover in the office of seminary president. In 1980, for example, the average length of service was roughly six years for both schools in the United States and those in Canada.<sup>21</sup> The schools needed CEOs to serve a longer tenure, both for overall institutional stability and for the relationship building necessary for effective fundraising.

The office of the seminary president had emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, paralleled by the office of “rector” in Roman Catholic seminaries. By the middle of the twentieth century, the office had begun to take on an ever widening range of responsibilities. As Pacala put it, “The management of resources was altered to embody modern business procedures, and administrators were expected to possess or acquire the knowledge and competencies that such procedures required.”<sup>22</sup> He continued,

The inexorable growth of managerial and executive responsibilities of senior administrators is rooted in the dynamics of contemporary institutional existence, a result of which is the shedding, decline, and in all cases the reordering of traditional academic and ecclesiastical roles of senior theological school administrators.<sup>23</sup>

The Advisory Committee on Theological Education Management concluded that the schools’ greatest need was for senior executive leadership training. A planning committee was appointed to engage research about the schools and their needs and to explore the formation of an Institute for Theological Education Management (ITEM). By the end of its period of study, the planning committee had concluded that

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21 Leon Pacala, “The Presidential Experience in Theological Education: A Study of Executive Leadership,” *Theological Education* 29, no. 1 (Autumn 1992): 16.

22 Pacala, *The Role of ATS*, 109.

23 Pacala, “The Presidential Experience,” 11.

there is a crisis of leadership in theological education today; the pool of management-trained persons from which seminary leadership can be drawn is insufficient, and few opportunities exist for quality training and development of current seminary administrators.<sup>24</sup>

The original planning committee formed the core of a larger committee charged to design the ITEM program.<sup>25</sup> In June 1980, the Advisory Committee on Theological Education Management (ACTEM) was formed and appointed to assume full responsibility for ITEM.<sup>26</sup>

After researching a number of models and receiving proposals from possible host schools, the committee proposed to ATS and Lilly Endowment Inc. the formation of the Warren Deem Institute for Theological Education Management, to be facilitated by the Riverside Group from Columbia University. The Institute was named to honor Warren Deem, a Presbyterian layman and businessman who had spent a number of years as a public member of the ATS Executive Committee, the precursor of the ATS Board of Directors.

The committee named three top priorities for the Institute, in response to the needs that had been identified:

1. developing an effective faculty and administrative team
2. training in strategic planning
3. developing models of leadership in which administrators and faculty function as teams<sup>27</sup>

The original plan was for a “serious and substantive program” that would require hard work and commitment from its participants and

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24 Baumgaertner, 43.

25 The initial planning committee included Dayton Hultgren (United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities), Badgett Dillard (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), Barbara Wheeler (Auburn Theological Seminary), and Tony Ruger (McCormick Theological Seminary). They were joined by William Baumgaertner (Saint Paul Seminary), Frederick Borsch (Church Divinity School of the Pacific), Lawrence Jones (Howard University School of Religion), William Lescher (Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago), Neely McCarter (Pacific School of Religion), Fred Stair (Union Theological Seminary in Virginia), and Jack Stotts (McCormick Theological Seminary).

26 Baumgaertner, 45.

27 *Ibid.*, 42.



facilitate significant skill development and content learning.<sup>28</sup> The Institute was supported by an initial Lilly Endowment Inc. grant of \$603,795 from 1981 to 1984. A continuation grant of \$592,245 supported the program through 1987, and a final grant of \$208,985 carried it through 1992.

The program began as a three-week residential program leading to a certificate of completion for work designed to “convert” participants to a new concept of the role of the chief executive, provide planning and management tools, and facilitate the opportunity for collegiality and times of reflection.<sup>29</sup>

The Institute was offered a total of seven times in the late 1980s for 203 total participants. As it turned out, despite the original design and purpose, fewer than half were chief executive officers (45%). Participants also included academic deans (20%), business officers (10%), development officers (9%), assistants to the president or planning officers (8%), and directors of student affairs (6%). The percentage of chief executive officers in particular annual cohorts ranged from 61% in 1982 to a low of 26% in 1990.<sup>30</sup> By 1992, the Institute was unable to attract the minimum number of participants needed, and so it was cancelled.

Analysis of the Institute pointed to its significant contribution to leadership development for those who participated. In his assessment of the program, William Baumgaertner asserted that “the graduates of ITEM who received their certificates of completion can look with pride to their peers with whom they shared an invaluable experience. Theological schools in the United States and Canada have profited immensely in ways that can be documented from the experience of ITEM.” In addition, “ATS has learned much about the importance of its role in fostering a high quality of leadership to insure not only the viability of member schools but more so the quality of their programs in response to their stated mission.”<sup>31</sup>

Baumgaertner’s analysis also offered reflections on what was learned from the Institute. The strong subsidies from Lilly Endowment Inc., for example, enabled the format, resources, and quality of the program. Without those subsidies, it would be very difficult, if not impossible,

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28 Ibid., 44.

29 Ibid., 51.

30 Pacala, *The Role of ATS*, 117.

31 Baumgaertner, 52.

to continue the program in its present form. Speaking of ITEM and the Association's programming for other groups, Leon Pacala noted that "it

“ . . . participants suggested that future workshops include more emphasis on learning from the wisdom of experienced seminary administrators . . .

was evident that the community of theological schools was too small to support a single-industry program of management training . . . without considerable subsidy from third-party sources.”<sup>32</sup>

Feedback also indicated that the length of time required for the Institute was a difficulty. And

participants suggested that future workshops include more emphasis on learning from the wisdom of experienced seminary administrators, perhaps in some contrast to the Institute's use of business and management professionals.<sup>33</sup>

Also of significance was the redefinition of the chief executive officer's role in a theological school. According to Baumgaertner,

The identity and self-concept of the chief executive were being shaped by new expectations in the constituency of both church and of higher education. These shifts ran counter to the instincts of many who were coming to top administrative positions in seminaries especially from pastoral appointments. Often acquiescence from a pure sense of duty left little satisfaction from the experience of institutional leadership.<sup>34</sup>

For some presidents, for example, the office was primarily pastoral, while others conceived of the role more as the academic leader among faculty colleagues. Beyond the particular understanding of the role, Pacala noted that in a more general sense theological education is "bereft of clear conceptions of executive leadership as a calling in itself."<sup>35</sup>

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32 Pacala, *The Role of ATS*, 118.

33 Baumgaertner, 51.

34 Ibid, 50.

35 Pacala, *The Role of ATS*, 117.

In a summary of his findings, Baumgaertner noted a number of items to which the Association would attend in future leadership education work. Leadership education should

1. continue under the management of ATS and the guidance of the Advisory Committee for Theological Education Management;
2. have as its primary goal a focus on strategic planning;
3. help develop expertise in breadth and depth, especially for management teams;
4. attend to the information needs for seminaries;
5. make provision for training middle level staff;
6. address the common failure to integrate management themes and theological reflection; and
7. encourage seminaries to allocate their own resources to leadership development, with less dependence on subsidies.

In the 1990s, ATS continued prior programming that served as leadership education. After a review of ATS programs and services, the Association renewed its commitment to leadership education when it adopted future program priorities. Efforts focused primarily on events for new presidents, academic deans, and faculty. For example, in November 1991 and 1992, ACTEM sponsored a two-day and a three-day Consultation for New Chief Executive Officers. The program restricted enrollment in order to facilitate interaction of participants with six or seven senior administrators from ATS schools.

## **Development and institutional advancement personnel**

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The oldest continuing leadership education program is that for development and institutional advancement personnel (DIAP), begun in 1983. The importance of that group's work was accentuated by the shift from dependence on denominational funding to the need for theological schools to generate more of their own income. In addition, the financial status of institutions had become a more prominent factor in accreditation.<sup>36</sup> According to Leon Pacala, "the Transition Study of 1980 documented the fundraising

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36 Pacala, 119.

plight of the schools."<sup>37</sup> Greater knowledge of financial matters was necessary for senior administrators, and fundraisers in theological schools needed access to resources and skill development.

A three-year grant from Lilly Endowment Inc. in 1982 enabled the formation of the leadership education group that would seek to

1. advance the professional growth and competence of financial development staff, drawing on information, knowledge, and experts representing the most current practices and state of the fundraising profession;
2. nurture a network of development personnel committed to the enhancement of their professional competence and the state of institutional development capabilities of theological schools;
3. provide resources, means, and strategies for elevating the public image, role, and financial needs of theological education;
4. advise theological schools on the formulation and advocacy of a case for the financial support of theological education; and
5. by means of research and evaluation, discern the state of institutional advancement capabilities of theological schools, identify emerging issues and needs, and assess the financial development effectiveness of theological schools.<sup>38</sup>

An important contributor to the development of DIAP was David P. Harkins, vice president for development at Eden Theological Seminary. For a number of years, Harkins served as adjunct ATS staff and special assistant for the program. Pacala concludes that "much of the credit is his for the success of the program."<sup>39</sup>

Harkins worked with an advisory committee made up of representatives of seven mainline Protestant schools (Eden Theological Seminary, Candler School of Theology of Emory University, Perkins School of Theology Southern Methodist University, Christ Seminary—Seminex, Earlham School of Religion, Meadville Lombard Theological School, and Emmanuel College of Victoria University); two evangelical Protestant schools

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37 Ibid., 120.

38 Ibid., 121–22.

39 Ibid., 122.

(Fuller Theological Seminary and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary); and three Roman Catholic schools (Saint Paul Seminary School of Divinity of the University of St. Thomas, St. Meinrad School of Theology, and Washington Theological Union). The proportions of schools from the three ecclesial families represented in the Association was fairly typical of the time, but the relative proportions of member schools was changing. According to Glenn Miller,

The period from 1980 to 1995 was the last period in which the larger world of theological education reflected the inherited dominance of the Mainstream's educational institutions, especially, in The Association of Theological Schools.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout the 1980s, attendance at DIAP annual meetings remained around 120 to 150 participants. Programming emphasized current development practices and procedures. Just as important, the early DIAP meetings established a pattern that would be crucial for the Association's leadership education programming for decades to come. Pacala asserted that

the program succeeded in nurturing the identity and collegiality of financial development personnel as part of the community of theological educators.<sup>41</sup>

Although the grant funding from Lilly Endowment Inc. had initially supported DIAP,

the number of participants and the willingness of the schools to sustain substantial portions of the seminar's costs through registration fees enabled the Association to continue DIAP throughout the entire decade and well beyond the initial three-year period which was heavily subsidized by foundation support.<sup>42</sup>

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40 Miller, 249.

41 Pacala, 122.

42 Ibid., 123.

A supplemental grant by Lilly Endowment Inc. in 1987 further enhanced the work through funding to publish a quarterly periodical specifically for theological school development staff, *Seminary Development News*. The grant enabled the Association to print and distribute the newsletter to all member schools during its initial three-year period of publication.

Pacala described DIAP as “a signature program” of the Association that “provided resources and services that were unique and timely and that were used by a broader spectrum of member schools than perhaps any others of the decade.”<sup>43</sup>

### **Chief academic officers, chief financial officers, student services personnel**

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In the 1980s, a number of schools experienced enrollment growth, especially those in the evangelical Protestant ecclesial family. At the same time, most schools experienced growth in a number of administrative roles and the need for better trained personnel in those roles. As chief executives needed to spend more time raising the funds necessary to sustain their schools, the role of the academic dean expanded to take on some of the tasks formerly done by chief executives.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, as financial structures became more complex and student services expanded to recruit, admit, and serve new constituencies, the roles of financial officer and student services personnel required additional training and support. With these developments, the Association took on a more comprehensive and regular role in the leadership education of these groups: academic officers, financial officers, and student services personnel.

The Association hosted occasional meetings for a range of administrative groups in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, under the auspices of the Advisory Committee for Theological Education Management, the Association offered seminars for “middle management” in 1983, 1984, 1985, and 1986. Seminars for academic deans were offered in 1987 and 1991. In the

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43 Ibid., 124.

44 See Jeanne P. McLean, *Leading from the Center: The Emerging Role of the Chief Academic Officer in Theological Schools* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999) for an outstanding study of this development within the larger context of the emerging role of the academic dean.

1988–1989 academic year, the Advisory Committee awarded grants to 17 seminaries to develop their capacities for strategic planning.

These offerings were important, but leaders in the Association sensed a need for regular and systematic leadership education for administrators. In 1992, the Association published the results of an ACTEM study to assess “the seminaries’ need for administrative leadership education.”<sup>45</sup> The study, funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., had two parts: (1) analysis of the current issues and emerging needs of theological education leadership and (2) recommendations of resources, programs, and strategies.

The study ended with a summary of needs, current trends, and recommendations. In many ways, they reflect a framework for the Association’s leadership education work from that time until now.

Needs:

1. Attention to women and racial/ethnic leadership
2. Focus on senior leadership positions, especially presidents and deans
3. Promotion of a team approach to management, including bringing together presidents, other senior administrators, and trustee leaders
4. Creation of a clearing house of opportunities for senior leadership management education
5. Emphasis on qualities of effective senior leadership
6. “Vast improvement” in recruiting, contracting, and supporting persons in senior leadership positions, including the emphasis on the vocation of senior leadership

Trends:

1. Growing faculty involvement in administrative tasks, especially in freestanding schools
2. Increasing professional management in seminaries
3. Growing complexity of tasks and demands
4. Growing number of women in these roles
5. Desire for shorter and less costly programs of leadership development
6. Trend toward more participatory learning than a didactic approach; more collegial learning approach, with team learning

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45 G. Douglass Lewis, “Introduction to the Leadership Study Project,” *Theological Education* 29, no. 1 (Autumn 1992): 5.

Recommendations:

1. Conduct research on superior leadership, not just threshold competencies
2. Develop programming to enhance existing leadership, especially presidents and deans
3. Develop a means to recruit best leaders; including search processes
4. Discontinue ITEM; find shorter and cheaper versions
5. Convene women and racial/ethnic persons to identify best ways of development and support of leaders
6. Continue an advisory committee to support this work

### **“Leadership education for theological educators”**

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In 1998, the ATS Executive Committee considered the work that ATS had undertaken across the past two decades and endorsed the understanding ATS work in terms of four “core functions” of the Association—*Leadership Education* being one of these four. That same year, Lilly Endowment Inc. made a grant to ATS for Leadership Education Programs and the Future Work of ATS. Activities supported by this grant provided the opportunity to examine each of the major functions of the Association and to experiment with different patterns of leadership education. In 1999, the ATS Executive Committee endorsed a plan for staffing that supported the identified four “core functions.”

In 2000, the Association adopted six targeted areas of work, including three related to the core function of leadership education: developing an integrated system of leadership education for administrative leaders, programming for women in theological education, and attending to issues related to race and ethnicity in theological education. ATS then submitted its initial proposal for Leadership Education for Theological Educators funding, which resulted in the series of grants that have funded ATS leadership education from 2001 through the present. The 2000 grant was the largest single grant Lilly Endowment Inc. had made to the Association to that time.

With the inauguration of the Leadership Education for Theological Educators program in 2000, ATS undertook its first effort at a comprehensive and regular program of leadership education. The program involved four dimensions of work: education for senior administrative leaders,



development for faculty, education for racial/ethnic faculty and administrators, and leadership education for women in theological education.

### **Administrative leaders**

The strategy ATS used for senior administrators involved the development of professional association-type organizations, utilizing a “communities of practice” approach to leadership education. The strategy followed the model that had been implemented with development officers (DIAP) in the 1980s. The Association developed similar organizational programs for chief academic officers (Chief Academic Officers Society—CAOS), for student services officers (Student Personnel Administrators Network—SPAN), and for chief financial officers (Chief Financial Officers Society—CFOS). Each of these organizations has met on a regular annual schedule since 2001.

The Technology in Theological Education Group had its origin in 2008, and was made more formal in 2012.

Also in 2012, the Association added an annual School for New Deans that meets in the ATS offices in Pittsburgh and takes advantage of the opportunity to have participants meet and interact with ATS staff.

In 2011, two academic deans, Kathleen D. Billman and Bruce C. Birch, edited a collection of essays written by deans on the range of work covered by that office. Copies of *C(H)AOS Theory: Reflections of Chief Academic Officers in Theological Schools*, were given to all chief academic officers and continue to be presented to new deans.<sup>46</sup>

A key to the sustainability of these groups is a peer-directed system of education that can be sustained over time, which provides education in basic skills of these different leadership positions that nurtures the kind of networking that contributes to problem solving and information sharing, and that supports persons serving in these roles.

Also beginning in 2001, ATS developed a system of educational support for presidents that has included an annual seminar for new presidents and an annual intensive workshop for all presidents, with preference given to those in their first five years in office. A systemic pattern of educational support for presidents has been established. It has identified crucial area of presidential work, developed a three-year curriculum for ongoing

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46 Kathleen D. Billman and Bruce C. Birch, eds., *C(H)AOS Theory: Reflections of Chief Academic Officers in Theological Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

education, developed a significant written resource in support of this curriculum, and implemented a pattern of educational events for both new and more experienced presidents. *A Handbook for Seminary Presidents* was published in 2006 and has provided both a resource for theological school CEOs and a pattern of curriculum for presidential leadership education events.<sup>47</sup>

The Association has also regularly convened affinity groups of CEOs, including

- African American presidents, in recent years joined by academic deans;
- Latino/a presidents and deans;
- Asian/Asian North American presidents and deans;
- university divinity school deans, because of their distinctive role as leaders of theological schools within research universities;
- directors of the numerous consortia of theological schools within the Association; and
- a rotation of small school presidents, women presidents, embedded school presidents, and presidents of Asian schools prior to meetings of the presidential leadership intensive.

## **Faculty**

While there are other venues for faculty development, ATS has sought to engage faculty in educational activities that emphasize the broad vocation of the theological educator in a theological school. ATS has conducted workshops for faculty members who have completed their first years of teaching in an ATS school. The Association has also sponsored faculty consultations to address focused attention to particular issues, such as diversity in theological education, the MDiv curriculum, faculty development, the changing nature of the church, and the changing character of faculty work. Periodically, the Association has hosted preconference consultations with racial/ethnic or women faculty to provide support and to address concerns specific to those groups.

In 2009, the Association began roundtable seminars for faculty in midcareer. Designed for faculty members emerging into leadership roles within their institutions, the midcareer seminars helped faculty members

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<sup>47</sup> G. Douglass Lewis and Lovett H. Weems Jr., eds., *A Handbook for Seminary Presidents* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

become aware of and contribute to the larger lives and missions of their institutions. Also beginning in 2009 and continuing through 2013, ATS hosted events in conjunction with meetings of the American Academy of Religion and/or the Society of Biblical Literature for presentations by experienced theological educators and receptions for ATS faculty present at those gatherings.<sup>48</sup>

### **Racial/ethnic faculty and administrators**

The 2000 grant provided funds for ATS to initiate programmatic work with racial/ethnic faculty and administrators that has continued in a variety of forms to the present. ATS had conducted some work in the 1970s with racial/ethnic constituents in theological education, but the inability to find continued funding brought those efforts to an end by 1980. ATS advocated on behalf of racial/ethnic diversity in faculties, student bodies, and administrative staffs, but had no programmatic work related to racial/ethnic constituents until 2001. The grant support facilitated meetings of racial/ethnic faculty serving in predominantly white institutions, a gathering of faculty and senior administrators who serve in historically black theological schools, a meeting of Hispanic/Latino(a) theological educators, a gathering of Asian/Asian North American theological educators, and a cross-racial dialogue between Hispanic and African American faculty and administrators. The program has also worked with faculty and administrators of predominantly “white” schools to help them serve racial/ethnic students effectively.

In 2009, the Association launched “Preparing for 2040: Enhancing Capacity to Educate and Minister in a Multiracial World.” Whereas earlier work had focused on support of racial/ethnic administrators and faculty, the “2040” program emphasized institutional development to serve racial/ethnic people. Teams from 33 schools worked individually and with other school teams over a two-year process on issues of particular focus within each school.

### **Women in Leadership**

ATS has provided educational opportunities for women faculty and administrators since 1997 with funding from a grant from the E. Rhodes

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<sup>48</sup> Presenters have included: Brooks Holifield (2009); Kathleen O’Connor (2010); Glenn Stassen (2011); emilie townes (2012); and Donald Senior (2013).

and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation. The Lilly Endowment Leadership Education for Theological Educators grant provided funding for two years of this program, followed by additional years of programming funded by a second grant from the Carpenter Foundation, and subsequent renewals of the leadership education funding by Lilly Endowment Inc. have continued that work. While the initial focus of this program was to promote the advancement of women into senior level administrative positions in theological education, it became evident that the most important contribution of the program was the education and support of women who often filled combined faculty and administrative roles or who were among the few women in their respective schools. Programming has been developed to assist women both “advancing” in their leadership roles and “emerging” into leadership within their institutions. During the 2017–2018 academic year, with funding from both Lilly Endowment Inc. and the Carpenter Foundation, the Association reflected on and celebrated 20 years of work with women in leadership.

## **Conclusion**

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The Association’s work in leadership education is a story of the remarkable work of visionary leaders, both from ATS staff and from member schools, who recognized the need for highly qualified leaders to serve the increasingly complex schools within the membership. Supported by visionary philanthropic organizations, especially the faithful and remarkably generous support by Lilly Endowment Inc., and utilizing a “communities of practice” model, leaders serving a wide range of roles in theological schools have served their peers by lending administrative support, sharing expertise, and building networks of colleagues in long-lasting and sustainable cohorts of leadership development. In close partnership with the work of accreditation that seeks to help each school become the best and most effective institution it can be, the Association’s work of leadership education prepares leaders to serve and strengthen member schools for the benefit of the church and broader publics.

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# Of Beltways, Runways, and Sight Lines: Perspectives, Challenges, and Futures of ATS “Global Awareness and Engagement”

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*ABSTRACT: Providing a century of context for the ATS commitment to global awareness and engagement, the author outlines briefly how that commitment has evolved, with a growing recognition of the changing character of “globalization” and, in that context, the need for diversity, mutuality, respect, and equity among all partners. The article goes on to cite complex dilemmas and challenges that effective global partnerships must address: defining ministry for a globalizing world, navigating politics and institutional commitments, and adjusting approaches to pedagogy, delivery, programs, and accreditation. His contention is that the ultimate success of global engagement will rest not only on programming but also on a shared understanding about and practice of partnerships and relationships.*

We recommend that this Conference assure the [International Missionary] Council of our genuine interest in theological education in all lands; that we express our conviction that the educational problems of any particular land must be met primarily from within that land; that we express our readiness to share in any possible and desired way in the meeting of these problems; and that we call attention to significant cooperative undertakings already carried out, such as the Deputation of the American Church History Society . . . the study of Christian education in India . . . and the approaching study of theological education in China.<sup>1</sup>

. . . a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue,

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<sup>1</sup> ATS *Bulletin* 9, “Biennial Minutes, The Ninth Biennial Meeting of the Conference of Theological Seminaries and Colleges in the United States and Canada,” June 12–13, 1934, 15.

parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused, and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.<sup>2</sup>

### **From “globalization” to “global awareness and engagement”<sup>3</sup>**

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Globalization, or what The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) Commission on Accrediting Standards currently calls “global awareness and engagement” (Commission Standard 3, section 3.3.4), has been a central concern of ATS at least since the 1990s, although one can argue that these concerns reach as far back as 1967, with the reflections of Harvey Cox on “world dialogue for theological education” in the journal *Theological Education*.<sup>4</sup>

The terminological move from “globalization” to “global awareness and engagement”—at least as a normative description of that part of the work of theological education that acknowledges that North American theological education is not (or ought not to be) the center of the theological education universe—was not made lightly, and marks a critical move within ATS. Those familiar with the dynamics of ATS as a membership organization know that by the time a normative statement is adopted (or revised) as part of its Standards of Accreditation, a long, somewhat complex, iterative process already would have been travelled by ATS

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2 Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142–148.

3 Part of the reason, perhaps more implicit than explicit, for the Association's move from “globalization” to “global awareness and engagement” has to do with an acknowledgement of the need for a working definition of “globalization” that is (1) broader in reach, perhaps intentionally metaphoric; (2) more hospitable of the diversities of global experiences, institutional priorities, and missional commitments of ATS member schools; and (3) more capable of accommodating and “holding together” both the legacies of tradition and innovation and continuities and changes of accredited graduate theological education in terms of its being decidedly normative, thoroughly performative, and intentionally formative.

4 Harvey Cox, “The Significance of the Church—World Dialogue for Theological Education,” *Theological Education* 3, no. 2 (Winter 1967).

member schools, including a formal two-thirds, “super majority” vote on the Standards of Accreditation themselves.

While there are multiple reasons for this terminological shift, one reading of the ATS conversations, perhaps the dominant one, is related to the pervasive skepticism about the appropriateness or adequacy of the term “globalization” (and its consequences for theological education) given its co-optation by (neoliberal) economic—even political (read “western hegemonic”)—globalization to characterize the normative vision of ATS in this area of theological education. Another reading of this shift is tied to the recognition that there are multiple meanings and emphases of “globalization” among ATS member schools—often deeply contested, sometimes almost incommensurable—hence the need for “less ideological,” or polarizing signifiers that would allow for a more inclusive organizational embrace of diversity in this area of work. A third reading of this shift is rooted in assumptions about the nature of human reality and language itself where human experience, because of its densities, is not always amenable to or exhausted by what Paul Ricoeur called the “moment of explanation” within the larger interpretive framework of explanation, understanding, and appropriation that the nature of human reality demands because of these assumed densities.

There are rich traditions, perspectives, resources, and practices on globalization within the Association, the significance of some still waiting to be rediscovered, further developed, or critically revisited.<sup>5</sup> Formal ATS

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5 Even the most cursory review of the issues of *Theological Education* will reveal the depth and breadth of this tradition. See for example: volume 9, no. 4 (Summer 1973); volume 21, no. 1 (Autumn 1984); volume 22, no. 2 (Spring 1986); volume 26, supplement 1 (Spring 1990); volume 27, no. 1 (Autumn 1990); volume 27, no. 2 (Spring 1991); volume 29, no. 2 (Spring 1993); volume 30, no. 1 (Autumn 1993); volume 35, no. 2 (Spring 1999). Of direct relevance for this discussion, perhaps, are: “Incarnating Globalization in ATS Schools: Issues, Experiences, Understandings, Challenge,” volume 35, no. 2 (Spring 1999); “Fundamental Issues in Globalization” volume 26, supplement 1 (Spring 1990); and “Patterns of Globalization: Six Studies,” volume 27, no. 2 (Spring 1991). One piece of historical trivia suggests how far back in the history of ATS globalization reaches: “At a meeting of the Continuation Committee, June 3, 1919,” the minutes of the Committee records, “a subcommittee was appointed to procure data relating to theological schools, courses of study, conditions of admission, etc., in England, Scotland, France, Switzerland, and Holland for the information of students of the United States and Canada who desire to continue their studies in the countries named . . .” Conference of Theological Seminaries of the United States and Canada, Minutes of Continuation Committee, *ATS Bulletin* 2, December 1921.

programming in the past ten years, at least, has not only built on these resources but has moved ATS discourse toward even more critical and creative directions that have contributed to the deepening and broadening of diversity, mutuality, and equity—core values that have animated not only this long tradition of “global awareness and engagement” in accredited graduate theological education in general and within the Association itself, in particular, but also in the larger life and work of the Association’s member schools.

Three historical developments are worth mentioning at the outset because they pose significant framing implications for the question of “global awareness and engagement”: (1) the demographic shifts signaled by the cipher “2040,” (2) the shifting “center” of Christianity from the Global North to the Global South, and (3) the rapid growth of immigrant churches in North America in the last 20 years. ATS has programmatically attended to the first development for some time now (e.g., through the programmatic work of its Committee on Race and Ethnicity). And while it has addressed the second two on occasion or indirectly (e.g., the racial/ethnic, constituency-based conferences in the early 2000s), these areas remain largely unaddressed, leading some racial/ethnic constituencies who were involved in these events to note that “ATS has abandoned us.” These three historical developments are not only raising even more clearly the question of “global awareness and engagement,” but they also hold the possibility of decisively shaping the future of ATS itself.

For many ATS member schools, “global awareness and engagement” is framed largely, though not exclusively, by a concern about how best to understand the *relationship*—broadly conceived—between their particular locations as institutions in the United States and Canada and the rest of the world. Such awareness and engagement is built directly into the histories, missions, and ethos of their institutions—because of either the worldwide character of the ecclesial family to which they belong, their missionary or evangelistic orientations, or their geographical locations and the natures and compositions of their faculty and/or student bodies, and the communities to which they declare both affinities and accountabilities.

More recent ATS surveys that are part of its Educational Models and Practices in Theological Education project strongly suggest a growing engagement of schools in transnational, transborder, and transcultural



theological education.<sup>6</sup> Many schools have collaborative degree programs with partner institutions in the “majority world” at the certificate, baccalaureate, post-baccalaureate, and post-master’s levels—some in extension education, distance-learning, or “global-consortiums” formats. Others have faculty exchanges involving short-term teaching and/or research. Still others have both credit- and noncredit-bearing intercultural and contextual programs (e.g., travel seminars, immersion and contextualization programs, and “missionary” initiatives). Others also have partnerships with their historic communities of origin—whether global-global, global-south, or south-south.

Some schools have established centers directly related to global awareness and engagement (e.g., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School’s Center for World Christianity and Global Theology, Ambrose Seminary’s Jaffray Centre for Global Initiatives, and New York Theological Seminary’s Center for World Christianity). Certain schools offer Spanish- or Mandarin-language courses, while others have Korean-language degree programs. Some ATS schools have extension sites in Germany, the Ukraine, Indonesia, Guatemala, and Thailand.

While not always uniformly articulated, member schools—in addition to their missional and theological convictions regarding global awareness and engagement—have a wide range of rationales for their programs and initiatives. These include (1) a recognition that quality theological education in North America, including its relevance, must not only have an external “global reach” but must also integrate non-North American theological resources as constitutive of its North American identity; (2) a realization that sustainable quality education should be a globally shared enterprise whose survival is inextricably linked to this “global” reciprocity in the production and reproduction of theological knowledge, wisdom, and practice; (3) an affirmation that the educational purpose of a “good theological school” or “good theological education” is to prepare students to be “global citizens” who have the appropriate competencies, capacities, and sensibilities adequate to a fast-changing interdependent and globalizing world; and (4) a conviction that any theological education that

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6 See Deborah H. C. Gin, “Four points to consider for international partnerships,” *Colloquy Online*, February 2018, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/colloquy-online/four-points-to-consider-for-international-partnerships.pdf>.

deserves to be called “good” must be able to embrace, if not navigate, the difficult but necessary intersectionalities of “the global” and “the local.”

In the past five years, due in part to an increasing, if not re-awakened, interest in ATS outside North America, and also to the “globalization of theological education” in a shrinking world,<sup>7</sup> ATS staff and other ATS-related individuals have been involved in transborder, transdisciplinary, transorganizational conversations, resource sharing, and cooperative programming with such international organizations as the Asia Theological Association (ATA), the Association for Theological Education in Southeast Asia (ATESEA), the Foundation for Theological Education in Southeast Asia (FTESEA), the International Council on Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE), the Lausanne Movement, the World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions (WOCATI), and the World Council of Churches’ Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE).

These international organizations and others like them are important partners who rightly perceive that ATS may have much to offer them. In return, no doubt, individual ATS member schools as well as the Association as a whole, have much to learn from theological education outside North American boundaries. Recognizing this growing *rediscovery* of mutual, reciprocal need, the ATS Board of Directors began to revisit, at least since 2009, the idea and practice of “globalization,” engaging in more structured conversations regarding the subject, first in terms of the notion of “ATS as a ‘big’ tent” and more recently in terms of the framework of “ATS and world Christianity.”

### **Inside the “big tent” ecumenical beltway: institutional, organizational, and programmatic issues**

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Where the former is concerned, the working group convened by the ATS Board of Directors to explore the subject and review the practice of “big tent ecumenicity,” after several meetings by conference call culminating in its November 2012 board meeting, decided to pursue the notion

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<sup>7</sup> Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsoon Kang, and Joshva Raja, eds., *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity: Theological Perspectives, Ecumenical Trends, Regional Surveys* (Oxford, England: Regnum Books International, 2010). World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions, *Challenges and Promises of Quality Assurance in Theological Education: Multicontextual and Ecumenical Inquiries* (Fort Worth, Texas: WOCATI, 2013).

of “big tent ecumenicity” largely within a programmatic rather than an administrative/organizational framework, where “big tent” meant the larger Jewish-Christian tradition. It was agreed that, while the Association may have reached a level of maturity that allows for robust conversations on theological diversity among its membership, the administrative/organizational conditions were not congenial at that time for pursuing the question of diversity across *religious and multifaith lines*. While some member schools understand their institutional identities in terms of an interreligious perspective (e.g., Claremont School of Theology, Harvard University Divinity School, University of Chicago Divinity School, Hartford Seminary, and Graduate Theological Union), most member schools continue to understand their missions within a North American Jewish-Christian perspective, notwithstanding their recognition of the importance of addressing interreligious and multifaith issues.<sup>8</sup> World Christianity, rather than world *religions*, was affirmed as the primary organizing metaphor for “big tent ecumenicity.” That said, the question of interreligious, multifaith ecumenicity will not go away; and the conversation cannot be postponed indefinitely.

Thus, in its meetings during this period, the board agreed to more fully explore the implications of “world Christianity” for the future of ATS—of which focused reflection on the meaning and significance of transdisciplinary, transborder, and transorganizational perspectives and practices was a logical “next step.” In fact, while racial/ethnic and gender diversity under the sign of multiculturalism had its own specific origins in ATS discourse apart from the discourse on “globalization,” their co-constitutive character vis-à-vis global awareness and engagement has come to be recognized more fully so that the need to deal explicitly with the latter has come to the fore once again, this time within a multicultural, multireligious framework. These steps included an affirmation of the need to pursue more systematically at least two substantive and programmatic questions: (1) What should ATS be doing with *its member schools* in

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8 One way to read Dan Aleshire’s “Community and Diversity” plenary address at the 2012 Minneapolis Biennial Meeting is as a cipher of the Association’s readiness to explicitly address the fundamental importance of theological/ecclesial diversity, in addition to the more conventionally-accepted racial/ethnic, gender, and missional diversities long recognized by the Association, for the meaning of “big tent” ecumenicity. See <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/documents/community-and-diversity.pdf>.

terms of the question of ATS involvement outside North America? and (2) What should ATS be doing with its “partners” (e.g., ATESEA, ATA, ICETE, WOCATI, etc.) outside North America? The first question fixes its gaze *internally*; the second question gazes *externally*. Both are important to how ATS, as an organization, understands global awareness and engagement and are decisive not only to the programmatic direction that ATS should take but also, perhaps more importantly, to the future of ATS either as a binational organization that prefers to remain so, or as an organization that seeks to engage the world globally in the service of accredited graduate theological education. Needless to say, a substantive bifurcation of these questions would be ill-advised; and a programmatic bifurcation would most probably prove to be perilously nearsighted.

In December 2013, the ATS Board of Directors adopted a framework statement to both authorize and guide future ATS work related to global awareness and engagement in six sufficiently discrete, though fundamentally interconnected, major areas: (1) understanding effective partnerships, (2) global engagement within North America, (3) cultivating scholarly and programmatic “trade routes,” (4) contributing to a pan-Christian conversation on theological education, (5) educational and degree programs of study, and (6) continuing research and care. The statement also underscored the guiding principle that current and future ATS involvement in programs with a “global reach” must include constituencies and publics that involve mainline, evangelical, and Roman Catholic/Orthodox individuals and groups—a practice for which ATS is known in its work with member schools.<sup>9</sup>

As if to both pre-figure and embody this landmark framework statement, in the fall of 2012, a small group of individuals representing some of the ATS mainline member schools and international partners (ATESEA and WCC) met in Pittsburgh to discuss the present and future shape of theological education as well as the need for developing systematic and intentional partnerships beyond North America in the service of good theological education. Similarly, in late spring 2013, a small group of presidents and deans representing some of the ATS evangelical member

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<sup>9</sup> Guidelines on Global Awareness and Engagement from ATS Board of Directors, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/guidelines-on-global-awareness-and-engagement-from-ats-board%20%282013%29.pdf>, accessed October 15, 2017.

schools and organizations (e.g., the Overseas Council) met by conference call also to address the same questions that were discussed in the fall 2012 consultation of mainline schools. In January 2015, Roman Catholic rectors and presidents met to discuss similar issues in a consultation in Chicago, hosted by Catholic Theological Union. In June 2015 in Pittsburgh, ATS convened representatives of member schools engaged in global partnership programs of one kind or another to explore further the meaning and significance of those partnerships for theological education. Finally, in May 2016, ATS coordinated the first meeting of the Global Forum of Theological Educators (GFTE) in Dorfweil, Germany, gathering, possibly for the first time ever in one united forum, approximately 80 theological educators from 35 countries from six major church confessional families—Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Independent churches—to learn from one another and to share about the current situation of theological education and ministerial formation on a global scale in the context primarily of fellowship.<sup>10</sup> Finally, ATS staff participated in the historic consultation of ICETE accreditation agencies in Rome in fall 2017, the purpose of which was to develop a structure and process “whereby common accreditation standards and benchmarks [can] be developed within the ICETE network among accreditation agencies in consultation with the church.”<sup>11</sup>

In addition, for the ATS Educational Models and Practices in Theological Education (EMPTE) project, two working groups on “global partnerships” drawn from ATS member schools explored, among other things, not only what “global partnerships” might look like under the conditions of diversity, mutuality, and equity, but also how these partnerships

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10 These meetings were made possible through existing ATS undesignated funds and a 2014 planning grant from the Henry Luce Foundation.

11 ICETE, Rome Benchmarks, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1241553362592175/>, accessed October 15, 2017.

can be enacted where unevenness (political, economic, and administrative) is a dominant reality.<sup>12</sup>

These ATS staff-supported initiatives may be interpreted not only as a response to the ongoing commitments of ATS noted above but also as part of the goal of enlisting individuals and groups both within and without North America, assuming a framework of collaboration and shared wisdom, to help ATS as an organization to formally and substantively define its role “in the world.” In this regard, the WOCATI example is illustrative of an important institutional initiative in which ATS was involved. In the 1990s, with ATS support, accrediting agencies around the world were brought together for “fellowship, academic research, and mutual support.”<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, for reasons larger than the limited support provided by ATS, WOCATI was not able to build a sustainable institutional infrastructure on which the continuity of the organization needed to rest.

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12 As part of the Educational Models and Practices in Theological Education Project, two focused groups on “global partnerships,” consisting of 12 schools, met to explore the different issues, questions, and challenges that cluster around the notion of “global partnerships.” One group explored matters related to issues of reciprocity, spiritual formation (study abroad/immersion), and international accreditation. This group identified best practices for initiating, practicing, sustaining, and concluding global partnerships. The group identified a number of educational principles, including, but not limited to, excellence both institutional and educational, diversity and mutuality, experiential and group learning, interreligious faith dialogue, and integrity and accountability. The other group, identified crucial issues that, in their shared experience, arise when considering, initiating, and sustaining global partnerships. This included faculty ownership of the globalization processes in their respective institutions, the need to establish coherence in articulating degrees offered in different global contexts, and the need to investigate the philosophical and theological mindset behind global partnerships. The group also identified challenges and opportunities in global partnerships, including issues of institutional and educational effectiveness, financial viability, and attentiveness to educational principles. See The ATS Educational Models and Practices in Theological Education Project, “Educational Models and Practices Peer Group Final Reports,” <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/current-initiatives/educational-models/publications-and-presentations/peer-group-final-reports/peer-group-final-report-book.pdf>, accessed April 16, 2018.

13 “WOCATI’s greatest service to American theological education,” Glenn T. Miller writes, “may lie in the future. American religion, especially Mainstream Protestantism, is changing rapidly, and these changes may require substantial changes in how the United States educates its ministers . . . Just as America provided much of the world with the model of the graduate theological seminary, so the rest of the world may provide American Christians with fresh understandings and strategies of how to train their ministers.” Glenn T. Miller, *Piety and Plurality: Theological Education Since 1960* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014), 297.

The WOCATI experience raised large strategic questions for ATS that presupposed even broader substantive, not to mention political, questions, including the following:

- If ATS were to be involved outside North America, what should that involvement look like: immersion? solidarity? missionary? contextual? dialogical? bilateral? multilateral?<sup>14</sup> Who should be involved, and with whom?
- What are the dilemmas posed by such an involvement, and how may they best be addressed? For example, it seems clear that involvements at any of these levels (dependence, interdependence, independence) are welcomed by some and rejected by others? Put somewhat differently, what are the consequences of such involvement?<sup>15</sup>
- If “being involved” or “being available” are appropriate stances, how does ATS structure institutionally such “availability” that avoids past mistakes, while rejecting the easy response of “non-involvement/non-interference”? What would this “availability” cost in terms of personnel, financial, and other resources?

These difficult questions notwithstanding, the experience of collaboration globally affirmed the “convening capacity” of ATS, based not only on its long history as a membership organization but also on the basis of its commitment to “big tent” inclusivity in terms of both its program and its accreditation functions. And while ATS may be more known internationally for its expertise as an accrediting body, it has the capacity to convene and to extend the binational reach of its programs and services to a more multilateral, if not more global, level and to serve as yet another contribution to the vitality of “world Christianity.” For example, ATS programs

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14 Some of the images of involvement shared by consultation participants included ATS as both “host and guest” (hospitality), resource or broker, companion (accompaniment), or dialogue partner.

15 For example, if the Commission were to extend its scope of accreditation to schools outside North America, as some regional accreditors have, this could create a tiered structure of theological education in other parts of the world based on some kind of “favored status” achieved by schools that would be recognized by the USDE by virtue of ATS accreditation. Members of the ATS Board of Directors have advised caution, as part of its commitment to an ethics of “global awareness and engagement,” if ATS or the Commission were to move in this direction.

for presidents, deans, CFOs, development officers, and student services personnel might be made available to interested institutions outside North America while also introducing a more “global” content (e.g., the consequences of the presence of visa students in ATS member schools for theological education in North America) to benefit North American theological educators. ATS could also serve, as it has in the past, as a resource “broker” for its international partners, recommending or connecting individuals and organizations with ATS-related program or accreditation-related expertise.

Various consultation participants also acknowledged that many of the programs of ATS member schools—whether educational, denominational, or missional—already have some kind of global reach. And while there is no pressing need for ATS to provide a coordinating function, it could nonetheless serve as a clearing house or informational, connectional portal for these programs. The ATS database, for example, could be utilized to organize information provided by member schools related to areas of international interest, and made more available or accessible to partners outside North America.<sup>16</sup>

Consultation participants also acknowledged that not only does the global reach of ATS need to be deeply attentive to the diversities of mission, theology, polity, and identity both within and without North America, but also that its global awareness and engagement needs to be disciplined by a commitment to mutuality, respect, and care. For example, attentiveness to the unevenness of resources and interpretation of “good theological education” could express itself programmatically in the principled sharing of accreditation expertise, but without extending ATS or Commission membership to non-US and Canadian schools. Or, such attentiveness to

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16 Dan Aleshire’s plenary address at the 2013 ATESEA General Assembly in Silang, Cavite, Philippines, as well as David Esterline’s and Lester Edwin J. Ruiz’s presentations at the 2011 WOCATI meeting in Johannesburg, South Africa, are illustrative of this transborder information sharing. The point, of course, is, how can ATS make this valuable information and insight more readily available or accessible in ways that affirm both the importance of “high touch” engagement and the need for more sustainable, more efficient, and less labor-intensive methods of dissemination? See Namsoon Kang, John Gichimu, et al., *Challenges and Promises of Quality Assurance in Theological Education: Multicontextual and Ecumenical Inquiries*, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/education-and-ecumenical-formation/ete/wocati/challenges-and-promises-of-quality-assurance-in-theological-education>, accessed October 15, 2017.



the importance of mutuality, respect, and care could be expressed by ATS opening its North American programs to interested theological institutions outside North America while ensuring that its modes of delivery do not violate the ecologies of “local” theological education—including the rights of theological “self-determination.” It could also convene presidents of ATS member schools together with the presidents of theological schools from outside North America to discuss what partnership in a global context might mean. In this context, it is clear that ATS programming and engagement understands the constitutive necessity for diversity and mutuality, as well as the programmatic implications of equity.

### **Broader dilemmas, challenges, and perspectives: the runways of global awareness and engagement**

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One might wish that the Global Awareness and Engagement initiative was only about program, planning, and policy. Happily, it is not. A number of broader issues require attention, even as they exemplify the challenges that theological education has always faced.

First, there are definitional and substantive challenges including, for example, (1) how globalization and theological education are to be understood and linked, given the contested and uneven experiences of globalization arising out of different, if asymmetrical, institutional and educational resources, priorities, preferences, and commitments, as well as the fact that (western or “north Atlantic”) globalization in its multiple expressions has both constructive and destructive effects on life more generally or that it is only one among many “globalizations” alongside, for example, Chinese, Islamic, etc.; (2) what constitutes an adequate theology and ministry for a globalizing world, particularly in relation to historic faith and practice; and (3) how “effective global partnerships” should be defined and by what measures and criteria they should be assessed.

Second, there are political and institutional push-and-pull challenges, including (1) “brain drain” (for the Global South) vis-à-vis “brain gain” (for the Global North); (2) the need to develop self-reliant, self-sufficient, indigenous leadership vis-à-vis mission-driven commitments for resource sharing in a world of declining resources; (3) strong denominational missionary commitments vis-à-vis a recognition of the need for the affirmation of the non-Christian “Other”; (4) the perception of North American power and privilege and their accompanying agenda-setting prerogatives

vis-à-vis the ethical and moral imperative for hospitality and mutual accountability in an asymmetrical world; and (5) the singular though not exclusive accountability of North American theological education vis-à-vis the rest of theological education elsewhere in the world.

Third, there are educational and pedagogical challenges including (1) the perceived, if often assumed, normativity of English in terms of learning, teaching, and research; (2) the very real differences between and among cultures leading to different understandings of theology and pedagogy, for example, the differences between oral and reading/writing cultures, of rote and constructivist learning, and of egalitarian and authoritarian pedagogies; and (3) the growth of new delivery systems and models of education and mission (including distance/online, extension, and competency-based education), which are based on infrastructural asymmetries in technology and resources, as well as the dominance of an academic and curricular structure and culture that tend to privilege the Global North at the expense of the Global South.

Fourth, there are programmatic challenges related to educational initiatives—whether degree-granting or not—among ATS member schools, for example, that have international extension sites raising questions about (1) the viability, sustainability, and desirability of such programs, the roles of partner institutions in the implementation of these programs, and the effects of North American-run programs on the ecology of theological education in the Global South and (2) the role of North American educational institutions, including theological ones, in the credentialing needs and desires of individuals and institutions outside North America, for example, direct accreditation or assistance in the development, implementation, or improvement of their own practices of accreditation.

### **Effective partnerships: The religio-moral dimension of global awareness and engagement**

These challenges are illustrative of the complexity of global awareness and engagement, and instructive for understanding the deeper, perhaps less visible, religio-moral character of global awareness and engagement. By definition, the religio-moral is fundamentally about “what we can and need to do together”<sup>17</sup> in the light of what Plato called “the good, the true,

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<sup>17</sup> Manfred Halpern, *Transforming the Personal, Political, Historical and Sacred in Theory and Practice*, ed. David Abalos (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2009).

and the beautiful.” What is notable about the work of both ATS member schools and the Association’s own initiatives—at least in my own reading of the situation—is the religio-moral assumptions they share. Both are based on a belief that global awareness and engagement are fundamentally about the practice of “effective partnerships”: those institutional and educational practices that are animated by normative expectations of mutuality and collegiality, shared responsibility, accountability, transparency, and decision making between and among the partners at whatever level or kind; that have clearly agreed upon purposes that empower and transform those in the partnerships; and that are contextualized, sustainable, useful, and attainable. In short, effective partnerships are an inherently normative, value-explicit human activity.

Effective partnerships further illustrate the religio-moral, especially when they include those practices that emphasize the desirability of multilateral, multilayered, and multiperspectival strategies and voices that (1) seriously attend to the intersectionality of the issues related to global awareness and engagement, including issues around the dialogical, ecumenical, evangelistic, and justice efforts of faith-based communities including churches; (2) broaden and deepen collaborations, particularly in terms of inclusion, plurality, and difference; and (3) are intentionally sensitive to the nuances and specificities of asymmetrical space, time, and place. The religio-moral is articulated even more fully in those initiatives that encourage interdependence and relative autonomy in Global North-South relationships, that empower those involved in the partnership, and that flatten power differentials that arise out of the unevenness of human, financial, and physical resources as well as history and location. A more intentional multidirectional flow of resources between the Global North and the Global South, where the notion of resources is redefined in more comprehensive terms than just human, financial, or physical, is illustrative.

Effective partnering as religio-moral practice also includes the *formation* of a spirituality, where formation is understood as being constituted

by “wholeness, purpose, and community,”<sup>18</sup> that is articulated in (1) the enhancement and improvement of individual and institutional capacities and skillsets for cross-cultural, contextual, and inter- and multifaith competencies for institutional and educational innovation and change; (2) the knowledge and sensitivity to and respect for economic, cultural, and religious differences that shape theological education and practice worldwide; (3) the development and nurture of shared ideals, values, and principles among and between the partnering individuals and institutions; (4) the constitutive and regulative practices of active, empathic, principled, and humble listening, as well as translation and appropriation; and (5) the sobering “fact” that partnerships take a long time to develop and require trust for their full flowering. The importance of such a spirituality cannot be underestimated because our generation is heir to an insidious, subterranean spirit of indifference not only to others but to the *excluded* Others that, if left unchecked, will compromise the possibility of any kind of partnership—if it has not done so already.

In the end, global awareness and engagement cannot be understood apart from the kind of personal, professional, and institutional

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18 Stanton Wortham deploys the phrase, “formative education.” See “Educating whole human beings,” <http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/siteASCD/wholechild/Stanton-Wortham-2017-WCWP.pdf>, accessed April 16, 2018. Put somewhat differently, following the pathway charted by Jacques Derrida, one could argue that “global awareness and engagement” is about a sustained meditation on what “togetherness” means—both in terms of “death” or alterity (part of what “the religious” means) and “togetherness” (what this essay calls “global awareness and engagement” and/or “global partnerships.” The former is explored in Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*, trans., Pascal-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (New York, NY: Melville Publications, 2007); the latter in a lecture titled *Vivre ‘ensemble’—Living ‘together,’* delivered at the international conference on “Irreconcilable Differences? Jacques Derrida and the Question of Religion,” University of California, Santa Barbara, October 23–25, 2003, where he explores the entanglements of living together as an obvious inevitability, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, as a promise (and despair) occasioned by proximity and distance, identity and difference, and violence and forgiveness—themes explored in this essay as integral parts of global awareness and engagement as *being-in-the-world*. What is both salutary and illustrative, however, is Derrida’s unequivocal commitment to the practice of engagement, particularly with representatives of the historic Others. See, for example, his conversation with Mustapha Cherif in Mustapha Cherif, *Islam and the West: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (Religion and Postmodernism), trans., Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008). Indeed, my largest debt to Derrida may lie both in the fundamental assertion of the necessity to explore practically and theoretically what “living together” means—which this essay has called, “global awareness and engagement.”

partnerships that characterize such awareness and engagement; in fact, effective partnerships constitute the meaning, significance, and definition of global awareness and engagement itself. Moreover, such partnerships are fundamentally performative. They come into being as they are lived out and have no meaning apart from this enactment.

Therefore, any understanding of global awareness and engagement and the partnerships that constitute it must be linked to some understanding of the nature of actual human bodies and the “body politic” — as *ethnos*, *demos*, and *bios* — as these are the embodied sites of meaning, performativity, and spirituality. This essay now turns to these themes.

## **Bodies, the “body politic,” and *Mondialisation*: ATS beltways and runways rerouted — a socio-philosophical sight line**

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### **Globalization, *Mondialisation*, biopolitics**

In the English-speaking world, globalization has come to be assumed not only as the horizon (i.e., a range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular situation, location, or vantage point) but also as the way in which totality is grasped as an (intentional) amorphous, undifferentiated whole and as a spatial and temporal extension of a particular [Euro-American] way of life. The more conventional critique of globalization is that it is not only a limited horizon granted universal status but also that it has led us down a pathway that destroys other ways of life that stand in the way of its geopolitical, geostrategic, and geocultural extensions [e.g., colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy, cultural chauvinism, and, more recently, extractivism]. Moreover, globalization as we have inherited it is almost always accompanied, particularly in the Global North, by a fundamental subterranean epistemological temptation to represent the world as an act of a self-sufficient, autonomous, “subject of history.”<sup>19</sup> Such representation bears resemblances to a Cartesian-like aspiration for that philosophical, perspectival, and foundational certitude that grounds all modern thinking, feeling, and acting, as well as a Hobbesian-Lockean-like anthropology of a possessive and extractive individual that is also an

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19 Martin Heidegger, “The Age of World Picture,” in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 115–154.

epistemological or thinking-knowing subject with the power, privilege, and opportunity to name or represent, and therefore, to create, the world in *his* image: *Cogito ergo sum* becomes *Cogito ergo vinco*, and eventuates in *Vinco ergo sum*.<sup>20</sup> The biblical tradition calls this idolatry.

However, *globalization* is not the only term or meaning of *world* that is available to us. For example, Jean-Luc Nancy argues that “world” in the French language does not always carry with it the connotations of world as “globalization.” Nancy foregrounds *Mondialisation* as that process of differentiation and formation that “maintains a crucial reference to the world’s horizon as a space of human relations . . . of meaning held in common . . . of signification or possible signification.”<sup>21</sup> In fact, *Mondialisation*, unlike its Anglophone counterpart *globalization*, places the emphasis not on the representation of the world but on the creative act of *forming* a world. And while it is not clear to me that Nancy fully extricates himself from the representational, apophantic dilemma of globalization conventionally understood, the notion of *Mondialisation* and its implicit relational, dialogical, and personal sensibilities offers a possible clearing in the dark forest of globalization—a place of relational, intersubjective, and bodily disclosure the ancient Greeks called ἀλήθεια—in our conversations about global awareness and engagement.<sup>22</sup>

In this context, my insistence on understanding “partnerships” in terms of reference to the body and the “body politic” (as *ethnos*, *demos*, *bios*), which in this essay is another name for “communities of faith, learning, and accountability,” is decidedly empirical; I deploy the term to signify, quite literally, material, concrete, sensuous human bodies not only as a way to ground and orient my understanding of global awareness and engagement but also as a way to resist the objectification, reification, and commodification of human beings and nature arising out of the

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20 C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962); Enrique Dussel, *History and the Theology of Liberation: A Latin American Perspective*, trans. J. Drury (New York: Orbis Books, 1976).

21 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. Francois Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: State University of New York, 2007), 33–55.

22 In his work, *Besinnung* (*Gesamtausgabe* 67), Martin Heidegger lists nine texts where he examines the question of truth. See *Mindfulness*, trans. Parvis Emad and Thomas Kalary (New York: Continuum, 2006). One could make a persuasive argument that the “question of truth” as disclosure has huge implications for the present state of affairs, at least in the US context.

estrangement [*Entfremdung*] intrinsic to the dynamics of capitalism's relations of production, reproduction, extraction, and representation.<sup>23</sup> I also deploy the term philosophically and metaphorically to signify my affinities with what Michel Foucault and those who have followed his lead have called "biopolitics."<sup>24</sup>

The labyrinthine discourses on biopolitics need not detain us here. It is sufficient to say that they remind us of the necessary role, status, and function of "the body" whether construed literally, metaphorically, or biopolitically in discussions of religion, politics, or ministry today, particularly, where "bare life" itself has become a site of both disciplinary power and "*dispositifs* of control."<sup>25</sup> We need only recall that under the sign of capitalism and sovereignty today, the practical and conceptual divide between the οἶκος and the πόλις, or what the ancient Greeks saw as a distinction between "natural life" [*zoe*] and "political life" [*bios*], can only be sustained with great difficulty. The collapse of the distinction, as Antonio Negri points out, results in the "control of populations as a way to govern life" [itself].<sup>26</sup> Life today—and therefore ministry—cannot be extricated from its multistranded embodiments or from multiple bodies across time, space, and place. The good life can no longer be recuperated by upholding the distinction between *zoe* and *bios*, since the collapse of the distinction, under conditions of the exercise and circulation of power of globalizing, transnationalizing capitalist regimes, has profoundly altered religious and public life through discipline, punishment, and [*dispositifs*] of control. This is evident, for example, in the dynamics of forced migration so starkly

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23 Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*, trans. Martin Milligan (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1988); Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in a Capitalist Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

24 Michel Foucault, "The Birth of Biopolitics," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997), 73–79; Roberto Esposito, *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

25 Giorgio Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 2–3; Michel Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," in *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 194–228.

26 Antonio Negri, "The Labor of the Multitude and the Fabric of Biopolitics," trans. Sara Mayo, Peter Graefe and Mark Coté, *Mediations* 23, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 8–25.

demonstrated recently in Europe or “gentrification” in such areas as downtown Detroit or Harlem; or the framing of “the good, the true, and the beautiful” by Silicon Valley, Bollywood, Wall Street, and the fashion runways of Tokyo, Paris, Milan, and New York; or the proliferation of multiple iterations of technology (from the technical to the perspectival) and their multiple applications in realms of the political, the economic, the cultural, and the educational.

**A dispersed, displaced, and dislocated (and therefore mobile) body**

I have long argued that the “body politic,” including those communities engaged in accredited graduate theological education, is shaped by, or more precisely, embedded in, a number of intersecting, but contingent, mobile, and polymorphic conditions: one, it is dispersed, displaced, and dislocated; two, it is racialized and ethnicized; and three, it is gendered and sexualized.<sup>27</sup>

I have also argued that the transformative dimensions of these intersecting conditions, which go by many names, including, for example, mobility, hybridity, innovation, and improvisation, are compromised by the fact that significant numbers of the “body politic” have been either disembodied (i.e., expunged from that very body: dismembered, incarcerated,

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27 Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsoon Kang, and Joshva Raja, eds., *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity: Theological Perspectives, Ecumenical Trends, Regional Surveys* (Oxford: Regnum Books, International, 2010). See, for example, Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, “Recovering the Body: When Race and Power Migrate,” 85–103; Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, “Race, Power, and Migration: Reimagining Graduate Theological Education,” in *Contemporary Issues of Migration and Theology*, eds. Elaine Padilla and Peter Phan (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 211–231; Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, “I believe in the resurrection of the body—meditations and explorations on ‘the religious,’ ‘the public,’ and the Asian diaspora: a research framework and agenda,” in *Asian Christian Review*, (Summer 2013): 63–111.



disabled, pathologized, commodified, criminalized, or securitized)<sup>28</sup> and erased and forgotten, not only by modern politics but also by institutions of the “body politic” itself, including by the government, the military, the university, the church, and the clinic.<sup>29</sup>

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28 This assertion of these “disembodiments” requires a more complex argument that a short essay cannot sustain. Because I have made this argument elsewhere, it is sufficient to suggest here that a fulsome understanding of global awareness and engagement, even in graduate theological education, will need to attend to the new geopolitics experienced by many today as being more unapologetically predatory, even more widespread, almost proto-fascist, and undeniably xenophobic. The realities of “forced migration,” globally, and of “immigration,” in the US context that have exploded on the world stage in the past few years (e.g., the “refugee crisis” in Europe, the US debate on immigration in the United States, and even more poignantly, the forced migration of communities resulting from “natural” disasters—Puerto Rico, Florida, Texas, California)—particularly the responses to certain sectors of the body politic—reveal a profound reliance on a geopolitical understanding that is state-centric, juridically-bounded, administratively implemented, and an intentionally exclusionary aggregate of competing interests. It is a spatial and temporal extension of a particular North Atlantic way of life, articulated in terms of structures and processes that privilege sovereign states and their bureaucratic apparatuses as the legitimate form of planetary life. Those who are “strangers” (or Others) to these structures and processes, or who do not conform or comply, are treated as criminals or as “security risks”—hence the phrase “bodies that are criminalized, incarcerated, and securitized,” or are excluded or minoritized because of disability or pathology. This is not new, of course, but the point directly relevant to this essay is not only that these crises are ethical problems requiring a response, but rather that this understanding of geopolitics that has come to be assumed not only as the horizon (i.e., a range of vision and its accompanying practices that includes everything that can be seen from a particular situation, location or vantage point), but also as the way in which totality is grasped, making it both an ontological and epistemological matter to be addressed. See Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, “Conversations with Migrant Advocates: Do we believe in the resurrection of the body?” in *The Intersections of Migration, Human Rights, and Development Justice*, Liberato Bautista and Mervin Toquero, eds. (New York and Quezon City: NCCP & GBCS UMC, 2014), 81–106; Lester Edwin J. Ruiz, “Afterword: CWWM’s Journey From New York to Berlin—Finding Our Way Home,” in *Turning Strangers into Friends: Hospitality, Mercy, Justice*, Liberato C. Bautista, ed. (Quezon City: National Council of Churches in the Philippines, 2017), 65–76.

29 Saskia Sassen calls this “expulsions” in her book, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2014). See also Mark Lewis Taylor, *The Executed God: The Way of the Cross in Lockdown America* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2015); Elizabeth Barnes, *The Minority Body: A Theory of Disability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Nancy Leong, “Racial Capitalism,” *Harvard Law Review* 126, no. 8 (June 2013): 2,151–2,226. See, more generally, Karl Marx, “The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof” in <https://web.stanford.edu/~davies/Symbsys100-Spring0708/Marx-Commodity-Fetishism.pdf>, accessed December 22, 2017. See also, for example, <https://boxedambivalence.wordpress.com/2008/06/08/q1-commodification-of-the-female-body/>, accessed December 22, 2017.

Four things can be said concerning the first condition. First, the dispersal, displacement, and dislocation of bodies cannot be explained by any one theory, although one of the suggestive metaphors for the changes that are occurring worldwide has been that of turbulence, suggesting by its use not mere motion, activity, or movement, but disruptive, unpredictable, volatile speed.<sup>30</sup> Second, there is a compelling argument to be made that these changes are, in fact, part of what Anthony Giddens called “the consequences of modernity,” including (1) the separation and emptying of time and space, (2) the development of disembedding mechanisms like symbolic tokens and expert systems, and (3) the reflexive appropriation of knowledge.<sup>31</sup> Third, these conditions are not only structured and sustained by the movements and flows of capital, people, goods, information, ideas, and images; they are, in fact, socially constructed by the very actions and/or activities of those individuals and communities that have been globally dispersed, displaced, and dislocated. And, fourth, these dispersals, displacements, and dislocations—while creating conditions of estrangement, marginalization, antagonism, exclusion, even disintegration and *anomie*, and what Zygmunt Bauman calls the “endemic uncertainty of liquid modernity”<sup>32</sup>—have also given rise to languages and experiences of multiplicity, plurality, and difference as well as hybridity, intersectionality, and liminality, and therefore to the possibilities of transformation, innovation, and improvisation in political, economic, cultural, and religious life.

### **A racialized and ethnicized body**

Two things may be said concerning the second condition. First, following the work of the “critical race theorists,” it is important not to yield to the temptation of the “uncritical use of biological and essential conceptions of race as premises of antiracist struggles,” and to acknowledge that “the term ‘race’ may be so historically and socially overdetermined that it

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30 Nikos Papastergiadis, *The Turbulence of Migration: Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 3–21.

31 Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 16–50.

32 Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 4–26.

is beyond rehabilitation."<sup>33</sup> At the same time, following Ronald Takaki, it may be important to assert that racial experience is both quantitatively and qualitatively different from ethnic experience and, therefore, to be careful not to reduce "race" to "ethnicity" or "cultural identity."<sup>34</sup> An undifferentiated view fails to account for the centrality of race in the histories of oppressed groups and therefore underestimates the degree to which traditional notions of race have shaped, and continue to shape, the societies in which we live, including through the decisive, far reaching area of law.<sup>35</sup>

Second, drawing on the work of Michael Omi and Howard Winant—which deploys the term "racialization" to signify "the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice or group," thereby underscoring the "contingent and changing nature of race and racism while recognizing its pervasive and systematic effect on our history"<sup>36</sup>—we can argue that there can be no homogenous or unitary notion of race and that its meaning, of necessity, will not only arise out of its multistranded contexts but also will have multiple accounts: biological, social, cultural, essential, strategic, and political. With Chong-Soon Lee we might conclude not only that "race as ethnicity may actually hinder our ability to resist entrenched forms of racism" but that race as a creature irreducible to ethnicity is needed in order to understand that colonialism, say in Africa, as an expression of imperialism, is both about racial domination and ethno-cultural oppression.<sup>37</sup> It may be, as well, that the notion of (white) *privilege* or (white) *supremacy* globally construed may be a more productive framework for addressing this form of oppression, especially in order to move the discourse beyond the "white/black" racial binary. Such a construal of race also provides opportunities to discover how the

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33 Jayne Chong-Soon Lee, "Navigating the Topology of Race," in *Critical Race Theory*, eds. Kimberle Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas (New York: The New Press, 1995), 441.

34 Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*, rev. ed. (New York: Back Bay Books, 2008).

35 Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, "Race Liberalism and the Deradicalization of Racial Reform," *Harvard Law Review* 130, no. 9 (October 2017): 2,298–2,319. See also Nancy Leong, "Racial Capitalism," note 28.

36 Michael Omi and Howard A. Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1986), 68.

37 Chong-Soon Lee, "Navigating the Topology of Race," 442.

different ways one's racialized and ethnicized contexts and origins are constitutive of transformative theological education.

### **A gendered and sexualized body**

Concerning the third condition, I have argued that much can be learned about the body and the "body politic" from the struggles of feminist, womanist, and *Mujerista*, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and intersexed [LGBTQI] members of the "body politic," not only to regain control of their bodies, but also to recuperate the places of their bodies in religious and public life.

In the first place, these struggles to recover the place of the body in religious and public life involve different ways of producing, reproducing, and valuing (different) knowledges (epistemologies), consistently focused on the necessity of rethinking the relationship between reason and desire and the construction of conceptual models that demonstrate the mutually constitutive rather than oppositional relationship between them. In the second place, these struggles to recover the place of the body in religious and public life involve different modes of being (ontologies), insisting not only that thinking, feeling, and acting are relational practices but also that bodies—more than passive, sexualized biological objects—can be refigured and reinscribed. In the third place, these struggles to recover the place of the body in religious and public life involve different forms of consciousness (subjectivities), not only acknowledging that consciousness arises out of concrete and sensuous activity but also that subjectivity itself is *performative* and that spirituality is always and already ecologically-embedded and embodied experience, including different practices of touching, feeling, smelling, tasting, eating, imagining, and making love. In the fourth place, these struggles to recover the place of the body in religious and public life involve different empowering practices (politics), recognizing not only the importance of self-definition, self-valuation, self-reliance, and self-determination but also the necessity of transformation, transgression, and resistance, and of finding shared safe places and clear voices in the midst of difference—particularly where the asymmetries of power are mediated through structures and processes that legitimize or naturalize some differences and not others.

## A spirituality of global engagement: the religio-moral as being-in-the-world

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Avta Brah and Ann Phoenix, in a 2004 essay titled, “Ain’t I A Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality,” demonstrate through the use of autobiography and empirical studies that “social class [and its intersections with gender and ‘race’ or sexuality] are simultaneously subjective, structural, and about social positioning and everyday practices.” Especially intriguing is the conclusion to the essay that invites reflection on the “potential contributions to intersectional analysis of theoretical and political approaches such as those associated with poststructuralism, postcolonial feminist analysis, and diaspora studies.”<sup>38</sup>

Intersectionality directs our gaze to at least three important religio-moral questions: the nature of the social totality, the character of subjectivity, and the challenge of practice, this time articulated as the question of “effective partnerships.” But why are they important?

First, the importance of attending to the nature of the social totality underscores the importance of embodied connections of space, time, and place. Richard Thompson Ford argued, for example, that racial segregation in the United States is created and perpetuated by racially identified space and that the latter “results from public policy and legal sanctions . . . ,”<sup>39</sup> which, I will add, are played out—articulated, represented, implicated—on the actual bodies of human beings. In a different though not unrelated context, Foucault may be interpreted as underscoring the rearticulation of the social totality when he observes that “a whole history remains to be written of spaces—which would at the same time be the history of powers (both these terms are in the plural)—from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat . . . passing via economic and political

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38 Avta Brah and Ann Phoenix, “Ain’t I a Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 5, no. 3 (2004): 75–86; Avta Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, (New York: Routledge, 1996), 17–83. See also, Giorgio Agamben’s notion of “apparatus” in *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 2–3. See also, Michel Foucault’s *dispositif* in “The Confession of the Flesh,” 194–228.

39 Richard Thompson Ford, “The Boundaries of Race: Political Geography in Legal Analysis,” *Critical Race Theory*, note 32, 449–465.

installations"<sup>40</sup>—not only from the Global North to the Global South, but also within the Global South.

Second, where subjectivity is concerned, the recognition of actual bodies as multiple, multistranded, and multifaceted performative sites fundamentally challenges all ahistorical, essentialist, nonrelational, and reified construals of "the Subject" and directs us not only to the question "What is to be done?" but also to the questions of identity: "who we are, what we hope for, where we are going, how do we get there?" This "reinstalls" the notion of subjectivity within a much deeper, broader, intersectional, relational, ecological, and performative whole. My insistence on situating "the Subject" in these ways is an attempt to side-step the long and destructive shadow cast by the anthropocentric, auto-referential, philosophical, epistemic, and political Sovereign of that part of Euro-American life associated with "modernity" or "the Enlightenment." In this context, race, gender, sexuality, and security are not only the extensions or effects of human action; they are also entanglements of structure, process, agency, ecology, and thought.

Third, where the performative and therefore challenge of practice is concerned, such bodies direct us to the intersections of a peoples' pluralistic and are therefore always and already contradictory, antagonistic and agonistic economic, cultural, political, and religious histories—there not only to be reminded of the importance of context for ministry but also to be directed toward the religio-moral as "practical-critical activity."<sup>41</sup> The challenge is not only to link theory and praxis, thought and action, spirit and matter, but also "to grasp the root of the matter . . . man [sic] himself [sic]"—as sensuous human activity, (i.e., practice [performance]). To put the matter boldly, global awareness and engagement as the practice of effective partnerships is concrete, sensuous, human activity.

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40 Michel Foucault, "The Eye of Power," *Power/Knowledge Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 146–149.

41 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, trans. W. Lough (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 13–15; Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law," *Deutsch Französische Jahrbücher* (1844), <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>, accessed October 15, 2017.

## Conclusion: the futures of global awareness and engagement—the heart of the matter

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Focusing on the metaphor of “the body” as sensuous human activity brings the conversation both of global awareness and engagement and the religio-moral imperative of “effective partnerships” into the domain of the categorically personal, not only in the sense that it touches our lives (the phrase in ATS-style accreditation is “high touch”) but also that we bear simultaneous unconditional responsibility for the good, the true, and the beautiful, as well as the bad, the false, and the ugly (i.e., we own but do not control them). It also allows us to shine light (Heidegger’s image of light and clearing in the *Schwartzte Wald* of Baden-Württemberg) on the practices of accredited graduate theological education—which arguably is a necessary but much larger task than is possible in this brief essay. My more modest goal in this essay has been to suggest some reasons for the need to reframe the conversation on global awareness and engagement by bringing it more fully into the realm of everyday personal practice as effective partnership without separating the conversation from its ontological and epistemological connections. However, one more caveat needs to be stated—namely, while the personal may be necessary, it is not a sufficient condition of possibility for effective partnerships.

“Three things remain,” Saint Paul reminds us: “faith, hope, and love; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13). In fact, theologically put, at the heart of the religio-moral is the ineffable, irrepressible, excessive, and unconditional love of God. Without this love—given to us in its contingency, impurity, and at great cost in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and through the communities of faithful struggle both named and unnamed throughout history—the religio-moral would be an empty shell; global awareness and engagement would be less meaningful; ministry would only limp along. Love itself is performative as it is fundamental; it is constitutive as it is transformative. And while we essentialize and romanticize it only at our own peril, with some certainty we can say that existentially, without love, there can be no passion or compassion, no unconditional forgiveness, no vulnerability, and no genuine humility. Love makes courage, resistance, and struggle bearable; it makes *diakonia* necessary and it makes mutual respect, decency, and recognition of difference obligatory. Separated from love, empowerment, integrity, and righteousness would be mere dogma; there would be very little

tenderness, or kindness, or enduring joy. Love invites curiosity, wonderment, and awe. It contextualizes goodness, truth, and beauty. It sustains justice, modulates power, and nourishes transformation.

The “heart of the matter” is that global awareness and engagement, theologically and existentially comprehended, are about effective, loving, embodied partnerships that—in the context of ATS—are foregrounded as a “big tent ecumenicity” that includes theological/ecclesial diversity, in addition to the more conventionally-accepted racial/ethnic, gender, and missional diversities long recognized by the Association and the Commission. And where these reach to “the global,” they must include constituencies and publics that involve individuals and groups from the historic Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Independent Churches (e.g., in Africa and China)—a practice for which ATS is known not only in its work among its member schools but also in its involvements with “partners” outside the United States and Canada. The diverse gifts and virtues that these communities of faith bring to the table, when taken together and bound by love, inspire what ATS calls the “improvement and enhancement of [both] theological schools [and theological education] to the benefit of communities of faith and the broader public.”<sup>42</sup>

Strategically, I want to suggest that the future, if not relevance, of ATS as a “North American” institution implicated in the realities of “global Christianity” rests on its capacity to institutionally embody “global awareness and engagement” with *global* sensibilities as an intentional horizon, a sixty-thousand-foot sightline, if you will, for its work. Programmatically, I want to suggest, that the future of global awareness and engagement, in the ATS context, is exemplified in the kind of work of the Global Forum

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42 ATS Mission Statement, <https://www.ats.edu/about>, accessed October 15, 2017. Where diversity and inclusion are concerned, the truism was, even without theological or ecclesial orthodoxy, in the past ATS was held together by an educational orthodoxy (e.g., the MDiv, residential education, and graduate-level theological education), and that now, without an educational orthodoxy, the challenge is to find that which will hold the organization together. My own sense now is that despite all the diversity that can divide, all our member schools actually cannot disagree that our God is a gracious God—and when this graciousness is embodied in ATS practice, all the diversities can be “parked” in the presence of such grace, thereby allowing member schools to “live well together finally.” How this grace looks institutionally, I believe, remains the challenge for the future.



of Theological Educators—a relatively new initiative that ATS has helped birth as part of its previously noted Global Awareness and Engagement initiative.

Designed to provide an opportunity for leaders in theological education from every Christian tradition to meet and learn from those doing similar work but whose faith tradition might be different from their own, the purpose of GFTE was to establish a common platform for theological educators to share experiences and explore commitments and areas for potential collaboration. The role of ATS in the development of GFTE has been significant, primarily due to ATS' reputation as inclusive and not privileging one group or ecclesial family over another. As a primary objective of GFTE is to develop trust among theological educators across the long-established boundaries, ATS' commitment to maintaining a "big tent" in which everyone is welcome and no particular agenda is allowed to take precedence over others has been particularly important. As described in the final report of the meeting, "People talked across boundaries—both ecclesial and geographical—that many participants had not crossed previously. Perhaps more importantly, people listened to commitments of persons from Christian families that they had not heard before."

I wish to conclude this essay by noting, yet again, what lies at the core of both the initiative and the Forum—and which Daniel Aleshire, during his term as executive director of ATS, had the ecumenical wisdom and grace to see and from which he had the courage and humility to insist on our learning from again and yet again. To put the matter boldly, it was his *practical* insistence on "big tent ecumenicity" in the context of the challenges of world Christianity and the call for transformation in accredited graduate theological education that are his gift and legacy, as well as the hope of many.<sup>43</sup>

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43 See Daniel Aleshire, "The Future has Arrived: Changing theological education in a changed world," *Theological Education* 46, no. 2 (2011): 69–80, where he signals the need, perhaps, even the necessity, of continuity and change, conflict and collaboration, and the recreation of accredited graduate theological education in light of the fundamental importance of theological/ecclesial diversity, in addition to the more conventionally-accepted racial/ethnic, gender, and missional diversities long recognized by the Association. See also, Daniel Aleshire, "Diversity in Theological Education and Ecumenical Engagement: Diversity among the Theological Schools of North America," in *Theological Education and Theology of Life*, eds. Atola Longkumer, Po Ho Huang, and Uta Andree (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 208–217.

Excerpts from “The Concluding message of the Global Forum of Theological Educators (GFTE)” are instructive as they are prophetic and summative for future work:

. . . The GFTE’s composition is unique . . . key theological educators from the six major church confessional families—Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Independent churches—gathered together in one united forum in order to learn from one another and to share about the current situation of theological education and ministerial formation on a global scale . . . to underline the common tasks that face all Christian traditions. Some of these tasks include: building up new leadership for the mission of the church, strengthening the sense of unity among Christians, giving witness to justice with peace in the world, and supporting all aspects of theological education. The meeting was characterized by a deep sense of humility and of mutual openness in prayer and dialogue . . .

. . . In our many contexts, we realize again that unity and cooperation in theological education beyond the traditional divides are not a luxury or mere specialized vocation for some, but are essential to the future of theological education. Cooperation and dialogue in theological formation are required for the majority of settings where the church finds itself in the twenty-first century . . .

. . . We are aware that we can complement one another and need one another with the different gifts we bring to the common table in the area of theological education. The need to overcome stereotypes and caricatures of one another is crucial not just for theological education but also for our witness in a world that is torn apart by wars, violence, and so many types of injustice. We have been made aware of the need to continue conversations started in this first gathering, to foster friendships and collaboration birthed from our dialogue, and to seek together, as

educators, to work toward transformative theological education that serves the churches and God's kingdom.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Global Forum of Theological Educators, "Concluding Statement." <http://www.ataasia.com/concluding-message-of-the-global-forum-of-theological-educators-gfte/>, accessed April 16, 2018. See also <http://gfte.org>, accessed May 1, 2018.







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