# Training to Failure, Training to Success: *The Hidden Curriculum of Seminary Education*

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## Introduction

I would like to begin with a story. It is a true story – only the name of the key character and a few peripheral details have been changed.

Gregory was an exemplary student at theological college, gaining high grades, and known for his keen philosophical mind. Gregory's denomination had provided him with a scholarship through seminary under the condition that he serve the denomination for three years after graduation. His first appointment was to serve as pastor of a small church in a regional city. The church had been without a pastor for over six years. Gregory was very enthusiastic and looked forward to being able to teach all the wonderful new ideas he had learned at seminary.

Shortly after arriving and settling in the city Gregory announced at the end of Sunday worship that the following Friday afternoon an exciting new adult education program would begin. Keen to see as many participate as possible, he telephoned key leaders in the church to invite them personally. Gregory was confident that addressing the theological ignorance of this sleepy congregation would transform it into a vibrant church with a powerful impact on the community.

All week long Gregory studied and prepared, and spent most of Friday setting up the classrooms – one in which he would teach Introduction to Church History from 4-5 P.M., one in which he would teach Introduction to New Testament from 5-6 P.M., and finally the class in which he would teach his pet subject Introduction to Systematic Theology from 6-7 P.M. At 4 P.M. he waited … and waited. At 4:30 two of the stalwart old ladies arrived together. About twen-

ty minutes later an elderly couple arrived. All four stayed for an hour or so and then left. No others came.

Not to be deterred, Gregory focused on the Introduction to New Testament which seemed to interest these four the most. He again encouraged people to attend from the pulpit and by phone, and waited in anticipation for the following Friday. This time no-one came. Gregory's enthusiasm was shattered – as were his feelings of hope for the church. And it was only with reluctance and not a little cynicism that Gregory completed the minimum twelve months at the church, at which point he asked to be appointed to a youth ministry position in another location. Two years later he left the ministry to study towards a PhD in theology.

While this story may be extreme, sadly, it is repeated to a greater or lesser degree with far too many seminary graduates across the globe. Is there any wonder that so many of our congregations refer to seminaries as cemeteries, and despise so much of the product of our labor?

While many reasons could be posited for the widespread critique of our schools, I would suggest that one of the primary factors is our ignorance of the profound impact of the hidden curriculum, and our consequent failure to address its potential negative impact. The basic thesis of this article is that theological education can only be effective when the hidden curriculum is intentionally designed rather than unintentionally accepted.

## The Hidden Curriculum – Definition

But what is the "hidden" curriculum? Most of us, when we think of the word "curriculum" think of the course descriptions included in our college catalogs and the syllabi we hand out to the students at the beginning of each term. But this is only one form of curriculum, what is technically known as the "explicit" curriculum – those publicly known, stated and planned educational events which are commonly understood by all those who are participating.[1]

The irony is that while we often devote many long hours to planning our catalogs and syllabi, these are generally far less influential in the education of our students than the hidden curriculum—the potent sociological and psychological dimensions of education, which are usually caught rather than intentionally taught[2] – the pervasive environmental features of education that include such things as the nature of behaviors which are encouraged, the type of relationships modeled, and the values emphasized in the learning community.[3]

The hidden curriculum is subtle, but in fact it is far more powerful than the explicit curriculum, because the messages we communicate through *how* we teach embed themselves deeply within the psyches of our students and influence their attitudes, motivations, and behaviors in a way that our words rarely accomplish.

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[1] Robert W. Pazmino, *Principles and Practices of Christian Education: An Evangelical Perspective*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992, 93.

[2] Although not the first sociologist to use the concept, the phrase "hidden curriculum" was originally coined by Philip Jackson in his seminal work *Life In Classrooms* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1968).

[3] Pazmino, *Principles and Practices*, 93.

The following simple story may help illustrate the point. Mary was a young woman who taught a Sunday school class of ten-year-olds. Mary was teaching the children the importance of loving one another. During the class over half the questions were answered by "good" Christine; when it came time to pray, Christine was asked to do so; when a passage was to be read, Christine read; and on top of all this, the offering was taken up by Christine. Meanwhile two particularly active and playful boys, George and John, received frequent rebukes, were spoken to harshly, and finally sent to the Sunday school superintendent.

Now, while Mary's lesson was supposedly on loving one another, the real lesson she taught – the hidden curriculum of her lesson – was: "love is conditional on good behavior," "love has favorites," and, "there are some who simply cannot be loved."

Here, as elsewhere, we see an uncomfortable truth that has been well documented by sociologists of education but largely ignored by institutional leaders: the hidden curriculum always overrides the explicit curriculum—that is, if the explicit curriculum and the hidden curriculum conflict, the message learned will be that embedded within the hidden curriculum, not the one taught in the explicit curriculum. Consequently, we ignore the hidden curriculum at our own peril.

The hidden curriculum is pervasive in education. The way a teacher dresses, the presence or lack of humor, the thoroughness of attention to some topics, and the skimpy treatment of others—all of these communicate to students something about what is important and what is not.[4] Parker Palmer observes that "... the whole culture of the academic community with its system of rewards and punishments ... [and its] rules and relationships ... comprise a 'hidden curriculum' which [has a] greater formative power over the lives of learners than the advertised curriculum."[5] It is for this reason that responsible curricular planning takes very seriously *both* the explicit *and* the hidden curricula.[6] Effective education can only take place when the hidden curriculum is intentionally designed rather than unintentionally accepted.

## The Hidden Curriculum in Seminary Education

As with every educational institution, our seminaries and Bible schools also have a hidden curriculum. But sadly, this hidden curriculum often trains our students in the exact opposite way to what we teach in our explicit curriculum and what we claim in our purpose statements. While every institution approaches its education differently, and consequently provides a different form of hidden curriculum, I would like to suggest some common hidden messages that many theological institutions communicate to their students.

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[4] Ted Ward, "The Teaching-Learning Process," in Michael J. Anthony, ed., *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001, 120.

[5] Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: A Spirituality of Education*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983, 19-20.

[6] Robert W. Pazmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction in Evangelical Perspective*, 2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997, 238.

## "Schooling = Education."

One of the most common lessons we teach seminarians is that the best way to help people grow spiritually is for them to be schooled in the Bible and theology. Put more simply, we teach our students that "schooling" = "education." The story of Gregory is a classic example of this form of training. In virtually every seminary I know, grading and other forms of approval hinge on the cognitive mastery of biblical, theological, and historical data which can be expressed on papers or in examinations.[7] A premium is placed on the accumulation of information, and this priority on head knowledge is subconsciously transferred to ministry, so that those with information rather than those who are examples of a godly life are likely to be selected for leadership roles in the local church.[8]

As I travel around the world I see the schooling model clearly reflected in the standard classroom layout used in seminaries.

Even as we enter a class such as this we know the presumed role of the teacher: instructor, director, professional expert authority, an intellectual master in the field of study.[9] There is a subconscious emotional distance created by the classroom layout that
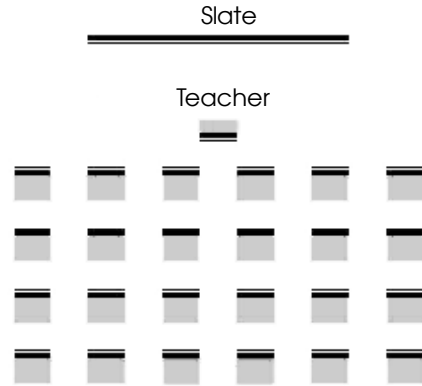


restricts a sense of freedom in opinion and discussion. "Knowledge" is viewed as an external commodity to be digested like lunch, and "learning" is often little more than conforming to a teacher's expectations.[10] It is the instructor who sets the agenda, who determines the syllabus, who is the center of attention. Too often the teacher lectures in monologue as though he or she is the only one who has anything important to say and that the others will be served best by listening. The unspoken assumption in formal classroom settings such as these is that the students are ignorant "open receptacles," eagerly awaiting the answers to life's issues.[11]

I recognize that this portrayal is rather negative, but it is unfortunately all too common. Is it any wonder that

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[7] "In school we are taught that valuable learning is the result of attendance; that the value of learning increases with the amount of input; and, finally, that this value can be measured and documented by grades and certificates." Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society*, New York: Harper & Row, 1970, 56.

[8] Lawrence Richards, *A Theology of Christian Education*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, 159.

[9] Kevin Lawson in Kenneth O. Gangel and Howard G. Hendricks, eds., *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Teaching*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988, 67.

[10] Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995, 134; c.f. Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*, New York: Doubleday, 1975, 58-63

[11] Duane Elmer in Kenneth O. Gangel and James C. Wilhoit, eds., *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Adult Education*, Wheaton: Victor, 1993, 142.

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our seminarians take this same emotionally distant "expert authority" pattern into church ministry? Our students learn so well from the impersonal and formal setting of the typical seminary classroom, that they themselves develop an impersonal and formal style of ministry following seminary.[12]

## An Academic Approach to Ministry

Through our research-oriented, book-centered approach to education we also train our students to believe that knowledge can only be found in books and an academic approach to thinking. Should it surprise us, then, when our graduates bring this academic approach into their local church ministry? In the face of all the research done into the way adults learn,[13] our seminary trained leaders pay little heed to the accumulated knowledge of those sitting before them, instead delivering well-studied treatises that are frequently irrelevant to those who come.

Often I hear seminary graduates complain, with the cartoonist: "This is my fourth sermon on the transforming power of the gospel. Why do you look like the same old bunch?"

But rarely do they consider that the failure might be their own—that the inability of people to experience personal spiritual transformation might in fact be our graduates' inability to relate the message to the lives of those they teach. If so, then they have modeled very well on their seminary experience. How rare are the professors who relate their teaching to the lives of their students. Sadly, the emphasis all too often is on the delivery of vast quantities of biblical and theological information rather than on modeling the Christian life.[14] We do a better job of qualifying students for the Christian version of *Trivial Pursuit* or *Jeopardy*[15] than we do of preparing leaders who can draw people

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[12] Pazmino, Foundational Issues in Christian Education, 238.

[13] A discussion of the growing field of andragogy is beyond the scope of this paper. For a valuable introduction to the significant differences between how children and adults learn see Malcolm S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton III, and Richard A. Swanson, *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 6th ed., Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005, and especially pages 58-72.

[14] Pazmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 238. Edgar Elliston ("Inter-Cultural Leadership Development," in Doug Priest, ed.,

*Unto the Uttermost*, Pasadena: William Carey, 1984, 284-288) comments, "The formal or schooling approach to theological education ... is typically isolated from the "real life" of the community where it is located and from the community where the students will ultimately serve. ... It provides an opportunity for advanced theoretical considerations in a teacher-centered hierarchical context. The goal of "academic excellence" is sought sometimes as an end in itself without involvement in the community to be served or in the lives of the students."

[15] George Wood, *Schools That Work*, New York: Dutton, 1992, 167.

"practical Christian thinkers"[18] or "reflective practitioners"[19] through asking them to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate theoretical academic material in the light of practical life situations, and vice-versa.[20]

## Knowledge-Centred Hierarchy

Too often we train a knowledge-centered arrogance in our students, i.e.: "I think you'll agree that the covenantal soteriological concept in this passage impinges on its Christological import."

There is a tendency in many seminary classes to make frequent reference to the original languages and scholarly books, often belittling straightforward interpretations as simplistic and praising complex interpretations as "scholarly." The clear hidden curriculum embedded in this approach is that only the educated (we professors in particular) can truly understand the Scriptures. My Master in theology from Princeton was in Greek exegesis, and so I appreciate the concern for letting the Scriptures speak for themselves rather than im-

closer to God and affect the way they live their lives.[16] While we teach orally "the Word became flesh," we teach psychologically and methodologically "the Word became text."[17]

Very often I hear the argument that the training of seminarians in the disciplines of critical thinking is an important preparation for ministry in an increasingly complex world. I would agree! But too often the term "critical thinking" is limited to the comparison and analysis of academic texts. How much more demanding and complex a form of critical thinking occurs when we ask students to become

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[16] Thom and Joani Schultz, *Why Nobody Learns Much of Anything at Church: And How to Fix It*, Loveland: Group, 1993, 54.

[17] John-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African*, Orbis, 1988, 181

[18] Joseph C. Hough, Jr., "The Education of Practical Theologians," *Theological Education* 20 (Spring 1984), 55-84, and Joseph C. Hough, Jr., and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christian Identity and Theological Education*, Chico: Scholars, 1985, 81-84. See also Robert Banks' discussion and critical questions in his *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999, 34-45.

[19] Donald A. Schon, The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action, Aldershot: Ashgate, 1991.

[20] This is consistent with both the model of cognitive apprenticeship (A. Collins, J. Brown, and S. Newman, "Cognitive Apprenticeship: Teaching the Crafts of Reading, Writing, and Mathematics." in L. Resnick, ed., *Knowing, Learning, and Instruction: Essays in Honor of Robert Glaser*, Hillside NJ: Erlbaum, 1989, 453-494) and cognitive flexibility theory (R. Spiro, P. Feltovich, M. Jacobson, and R. Coulson, "Cognitive Flexibility, Constructivism, and Hypertext: Random Access for Advanced Knowledge Acquisition in Ill-structured Domains," in T. Duffy and D. Jonassen, eds., *Constructivism and the Technology of Instruction: A Conversation*, Hillside NJ: Erlbaum, 1992) and reflects the importance of context in determining the understanding we have of any particular concept or principle.

posing our own preconceived notions upon them. Nonetheless, I wonder if we do not train our seminarians to learn a certain arrogant disdain towards the simple faith of many believers.[21] Certainly we teach our seminarians that most church goers are incapable of coming to the true understanding of the Scriptures, and so need us scholars to tell them. In other words, only those properly trained (namely us and our graduates) should

interpret the Bible. While paying lip-service to the great Reformation teaching of "the priesthood of all believers," our hidden curriculum teaches that there is a new priestly hierarchy with us academics comfortably seated at the top.

## Leader Control

The situation is further exacerbated by the tendency of professors to control the syllabus totally.[22] Have any of your instructors ever even considered consulting with the students before delivering the syllabus as if from on high? Far too often our classrooms consist of a professor controlling the questions asked and determining the correctness of the answers given by the students.[23] The tragedy is that our students take the same model into their church ministries after leaving our hallowed halls: just as our curricula are largely irrelevant to the lives of our students, the teaching our graduates take into their churches far too often is frankly irrelevant to the lives of their congregations.[24]

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[21] Ivan Illich comments that "students are academically processed to be happy only in the company of fellow consumers of the products of the educational machine." (*Deschooling Society*, 49.)

[22] One of the most insidious outcomes of curricular control is the extent to which it undermines the creativity that is essential to our being created in God's image. Ivan Illich (*Deschooling Society*, 56) observes, "Once young people have allowed their imaginations to be formed by curricular instruction, they are conditioned to institutional planning of every sort. 'Instruction' smothers the horizon of their imaginations." If, however, we affirm the value of individuals as created in the image of God, then we must provide opportunity for creativity through broadening the variety of instructional methods we employ, enabling our very different students to learn and apply God's truth in very

different ways – ways that while remaining consistent with God's demands nonetheless reflect their own individual learning styles. See Pazmino, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, 235.

[23] Compare with Ivan Illich's accusation that in educational institutions "most resources are spent to purchase the time and motivation of a limited number of people to take up predetermined problems in a ritually defined setting." (*Deschooling Society*, 28.)

[24] Compare with Freire's assertion that he can teach any adult to read in 40 hours or less if the first words encountered are charged with political meaning and consequently connect directly to the lives of the learner. See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. by M. B. Ramos, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970.

## One Size Fits Nobody

Too many seminaries take a "one size fits all" approach to theological education, providing little in the way of flexibility and student choice within program and course requirements. And, as with "one size fits all" clothing, so with theological education the end result is "one size fits nobody."



While paying lip-service to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, through minimizing student choice in the courses they can take, our hidden curriculum bespeaks a commitment to graduate uniformity that simply cannot be justified theologically. The contrast with Jesus' individualized and incidental approach to leadership training is dramatic.[25]

## A Fragmented, Conceptual Understanding of Reality

Another major lesson taught through the hidden curriculum of our seminaries is a fragmented, conceptual understanding of reality[26] that is more consistent with mechanistic modernism than it is with Christian epistemology.[27]

Our seminaries are compartmentalized into departments — Old Testament, New Testament, Systema-tic Theology, Church History, Practical Theology (does the title imply that Systematic Theology should be "impractical"?), Christian Educa-tion, etc. – with departments often vying with one another for their chunk of the curriculum. We teach biblical truths in logical sequence, organized in categories that are essentially impersonal, and discussed and analyzed at an almost purely theore-tical

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[25] Compare with contemporary Learning Styles theory, which emphasises the huge variety in student learning processes. See for example D.D. Flannery, ed., *New Directions in Adult and Continuing Education: Applying Cognitive Learning Theory to Adult Learning*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993, Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, New York: Basic, 1983, D.A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1984, R.R. Sims and S.J. Sims, eds., *The Importance of Learning Stylers: Understanding the Implications for Learning, Course Design, and Education*, Westport: Greenwood, 1995.

[26] The prevalent fragmentation evident in theological education is discussed in some depth by Edward Farley in his seminal work *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983). See

also Joseph Hough and Barbara Wheeler, eds., *Beyond Clericalism: The Congregation as a Focus for Theological Education*, Atlanta: Scholars, 1988, 1. In contrast with Farley, Robert Banks suggests that the source of the fragmentation of theological education is ancient, going back to the separation of learning from active service to God that began as early as the late second century in the Christian "schools" of Alexandria (*Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 144-145). If this is so a more serious re-appropriation of the apprenticeship model used by Jesus and the apostles must occur before adequate integration can take place.

[27] Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 73-75. See also David W. Wright, "Choosing Appropriate Curricular Models for Christian Education," *Christian Education Journal* Vol. XV No. 2 (1995), 25-39.

level.[28] Even so-called "practi-cal" courses tend to give much theory and little practice. This is not to say that content taught is untrue or unimportant. It is simply to say that the classroom teaching process does not attempt to tie biblical truth to the total person. As a result, students are trained to study and master Scripture and theology in a fragmented and conceptual rather than a personal or relational way.[29]

Our graduates take this understanding of reality into their ministries, compartmentalizing Christian faith and ministry, and seeing theology as a philosophical exercise with little relation to the way we live our lives. Is it any wonder that the sermons in our churches rarely facilitate meaningful change in our congregations!

For me, one of the greatest tragedies of Protestant theological education worldwide is that we Westerners have exported this non-Christian Enlightenment-induced fragmented and conceptual understanding of reality to non-Western societies that have a strong heritage of holistic learning. In seeking to satisfy a Western-dominated secular academia, too many schools in the non-Western world have turned their backs on holistic models of learning that are far more consistent with a Christian understanding of reality.

## Ministry is about Competition, not Cooperation.

The seminary setting, like the secular school, tends to throw individuals into academic competition with one another which encourages interpersonal distance rather than closeness.[30] Virtually all the assignments we set are solitary and individualistic, and our students learn loud and clear that ministry is about individual competition rather than cooperation in community[31] —that at all costs I must be a better pastor and my church must be a better church than the pastor and church down the road. And this in a Body called to the unity of faith through the bond of peace![32]

In every seminary I know a premium is placed on grades, despite their questionable value in terms of predicting occupational achievement, and despite overwhelming evidence as to their destructive nature[33] and the ungodly attitudes they promote. Is it any wonder that so many of our students come to measure success in life and ministry on external bases,[34] often hiding their own internal spiritual poverty?

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[28] Richards, *A Theology of Christian Education*, 160.

[29] Richards, *A Theology of Christian Education*, 159.

[30] Few institutional leaders question the competitive nature of academia, and I have often heard people justify the competition on the basis that "everybody" does it. One cannot but wonder if competition in Christian institutions might not be another take on the naturalistic fallacy: "What's typical is normal; what's normal is good."

[31] See also Hough and Wheeler, eds., *Beyond Clericalism*, 1.

[32] Ephesians 4:3. Compare with Richards, *A Theology of Christian Education*, 160, and Wright, "Choosing Appropriate Curricular Models," 25-39.

[33] Raymond J. Wlodkowski and Margery B. Ginsberg, *Diversity and Motivation: Culturally Responsive Teaching*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995, 275-282

[34] Illich, *Deschooling Society*, 58.

Interestingly, a recent study found that those students who achieve the highest grades academically are actually those who prefer to work individually, who show a willingness to conform to existing rules and procedures, and who do not enjoy creating, formulating and planning for problem solution[35] – qualities that are the exact opposite of the creative and visionary leadership so desperately needed today. Our current curricular forms simply function to "reward with good grades those students who assume an orientation towards reproducing" what is presented to them[36] – in other words, passive conformity. I wonder whether this might also explain why university and seminary faculty (including myself)—those who have achieved the highest degree of success in the academic system – are so poor at visionary curricular planning!

Our competitive grade-driven approach to teaching has repeatedly been demonstrated to produce poor learning outcomes. Lynn Stoddard observes, "Much of the learning in traditional systems ... is for the purpose of passing the next test." As soon as the test is over "information is put into the brain's 'closed file' ... because it has already served its purpose."[37] Sometimes I wonder whether our faculties have forgotten "that their chief instructional role is to promote learning and not to serve as personnel selection agents for society."[38]

## The Mind is the Most Important Part of the Human Personality

The current framework of theological education is based on a faulty epistemology – one that finds its roots in Greek philosophy and the Enlightenment, not in the Scriptures. In simple terms, the Enlightenment proposed that the mind is the arbiter of all truth, a perspective that stands in stark contrast to the Christian understanding of truth as personal, rooted in the person of Jesus Christ, and expressed through the great holistically-oriented command to love the Lord God with heart, soul, mind, and strength.[39]

It should give us pause to consider the enormous amount of content we pass on to our students, rarely seeing the content as a call to response. By teaching in this way we train our students to believe that Christian ministry is about transmission of content—not the transformation of lives through active obedience and a life of practical integrity. Should it then surprise us that so many people in our churches have plenty of good theology, but live no differently from those around them? In both seminary and church we have focused almost exclusively on orthodoxy—right belief—while the Christian church remains sorely impoverished in the equally, if not more important area

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[35] F. Cano-Garcia and E. Hughes, "Learning and Thinking Styles: An Analysis of their Interrelationship and Influence on Academic Achievement," *Educational Psychology*, 20:4 (2000), 413-427.

[36] Cano-Garcia and Hughes, "Learning and Thinking Styles," 425. Compare with Wlodkowski and Ginsberg, *Diversity and Motivation*, 277.

[37] Lynn Stoddard, *Redesigning Education*,

Tucson: Zephyr, 1992, 55. Compare with Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, 76-92, Wlodkowski and Ginsberg, *Diversity and Motivation*, 276-277.

[38] Ohmer Milton, Howard R. Pollio, and James A. Eison, *Making Sense of College Grades*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1986, 224

[39] Mark 12:30. Compare with Wright, "Choosing Appropriate Curricular Models," 25-39.

of orthopraxy—right behavior.[40]

Courses addressing spiritual formation and prayer are frequently absent from our curricula, or at best play only a minor role, as though these are peripheral issues unworthy of serious theological reflection and careful training. Do we train our students to see spirituality as something for the ignorant Pietists, whom we tolerate in our churches because we have to?[41]

In the same way, the lack of courses in peacemaking and interpersonal relations communicates very effectively to our students that conflicts in church and society are so insoluble that we can do nothing about them.

At a more profound level, by adopting the enlightenment agenda in our theological colleges do we communicate to our students that the scientific world view is more valid than a Christian faith perspective? That study is more important than prayer in Christian ministry? That the Holy Spirit's role in teaching and preaching is secondary, peripheral, or even non-existent?

A common objection to what I am saying is that this is not the seminary's function—that the role of the seminary is to train the mind, and let the interpersonal and other dimensions of personality and leadership style be developed by the seminarian's own local church. The problem with this objection is that it is naive and unrealistic, ignoring over 100 years of research in the sociology of education. In focusing on information transmission, seminaries not only teach but train, providing a powerful model that the future minister will indeed tend to follow. True, the acquisition of knowledge is an important role of the seminary, but let it be in a form that we want modeled by our graduates when they "teach the Word" in their local churches![42]

## What We Teach about the Bible and God

Perhaps my greatest concern with the hidden curriculum of our seminaries is what we teach our students about the Bible and God.

Our practice of careful dissection of the Scriptures and our advocacy of a "scientific approach to Scriptures" subtly but powerfully communicates to our students that the Bible is dead (after all you only dissect dead objects); a text fascinating to study but largely irrelevant to daily life.

"One theory is that this event occurred in the country between Bethel and Esdraelon, which included a portion of Western Manasseh, but another theory is ..."

Too many of our professors teach without prayer or recognition of our need for the Holy Spirit's direction in our teaching. By so doing we run the

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[40] This distinction was highlighted in the "Final Statement" of the First Ecumenical Dialogue of Third World Theologians held in Dar es Salaam, 1976 (S. Torres and V. Fabella, eds., *The Emergent Gospel*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978, 269). It is also reflected in the curricular emphasis on theology and ethics urged in Hough and Cobb, *Christian Identity and Theological Education*, 105ff.

[41] An extensive survey of seminaries conducted in 1992 found that less than 40% of students felt that their seminary experience helped them grow spiritually (see Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 200). Such shocking figures should shake our schools to their foundations.

[42] Richards, *A Theology of Christian Education*, 160.

very real danger of communicating to our students that God does not care about what we are teaching or even that God is not present in academic classes. Do we subconsciously deliver the message that God is the enemy of truth? Certainly we communicate to our students that prayer is only of secondary importance, and possibly we reinforce the commonly held belief of too many in our congregations that faith is a private matter and should not intrude on other areas of life—academics, social relationships, use of money, lifestyle, etc. All too easily we deliver the message to our students that there are aspects of life that are spiritual and others that are not, rather than seeing all that we are and do as intimately related to our identity as spiritual beings.

## Some Final Words

I have painted a pretty dismal picture, and I am sure it is nowhere near this bad in your institutions. Certainly my goal is not for you to give up in despair,

but to recognize the problems and see the possibilities for creative change. Moreover, we must never forget that God is very gracious and it is amazing what miracles He can work through even the worst learning context.

This said, I would suggest that as responsible theological educators living between the "already" of our frail and fallen existence and the "not yet" of the ideal to come, the call is upon us always to strive to a greater level of excellence. Consequently, we cannot continue putting our heads in the sand, ignoring the potent impact of the hidden curriculum in our institutions.

As we seek to enhance the curricula of our schools it is essential that we look not only at the content of the courses we fit into our catalog, but also at the structures, processes, and methods that we promote. The hidden curriculum must absorb as much of our attention as the explicit curriculum.

## Some Practical Suggestions

Do institutional theological programs have any options? I would say, absolutely! What prevents creative change is a clear and honest acknowledgement that there is a problem, and the recognition that theological education can only be effective when the hidden curriculum is intentionally designed rather than unintentionally accepted.

Having led you down the path of deconstruction, let me now begin the task of reconstruction by giving a few specific practical ways in which the hidden curriculum can become a positive learning experience rather than a destructive factor in the educational efforts of our schools. Some of these

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Как лидер, он совсем не окупает дожара!
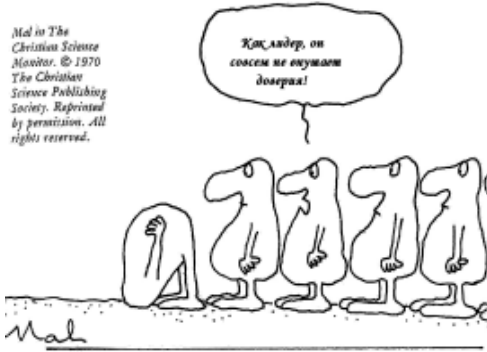
you may already have incorporated into your school, but the more that are embraced the better.

My first suggestion is one often made but rarely applied—and that is the establishment and continual strengthening of *Mentoring and Spiritual Direction* in our schools. Why not follow the example of many of the Catholic orders and appoint to each student upon entry into the program of study a spiritual director or mentor who would hold students accountable for the development and integration of all the dimensions of the personality in the process of learning?[43] In this way greater oversight of the spiritual and ministerial formation of the student could be maintained. The mentor would be responsible to meet regularly with the student to pray with him or her, and to challenge the student to grow in his or her relationship with God. To incorporate such an innovation the school would need to be proactive in training those who would play the role of mentor/director, and these people would need to have their instructional workload reduced to free them up for this crucial role in the students' overall formation.[44]

*Establish accountability groups.* As part of their program of study, students would be placed in groups of 3-5 (perhaps led by a faculty member) which would meet regularly (at least monthly, preferably weekly). At the meeting members of the group would talk about their ministerial questions, intellectual struggles, and what they are doing to develop their spiritual life and emotional intelligence—all in an environment of prayer.

Require students to keep a *journal* in which they register key ideas from every class, and then personal responses in terms of how this material has helped them in their relationship with God and/or others, or in self-knowledge, or ways in which they have put the material to work in life or ministry. At the end of each term students will only be allowed to pass if their journals have been completed satisfactorily. Perhaps the journals could be combined with the mentoring and/or accountability groups. While journals could be kept class by class, an even richer education may well emerge out of an overall, integrated journal.

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[43] For further insights on the process of spiritual direction see William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, Minneapolis: Seabury, 1982, and Jeanette A. Bakke, *Holy Invitations: Exploring Spiritual Direction*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000. Even here there is the danger of focusing on technique rather than God-directed formation, forgetting that spiritual direction in Catholicism is closely linked to the tradition's strong emphasis on vocation rather than professionalism in ministerial training. See George Schner, "Formation as a Unifying Concept in Theological Education," *Theological Education* 21:2 (1985), 94-113.

[44] The issue of personal and communal formation is central to Robert Banks vision for a missional theological education. See in particular Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 199-207.

***Behavioral emphases.*** Require all professors to provide a practical component to their courses, discussing the implications of the content for daily life, and developing assignments that require students to do critical reflection on real life situations. Perhaps reduce the content, and give more time to discussion of key themes that are of significance to contemporary daily life. Challenge students to live in obedience to the theology they study. To accomplish this goal, however, the school would need to change from the current professorial recruitment focus on academic qualifications, to recruitment that actively seeks professors who balance strong academics with meaningful ministerial experience and profound spiritual maturity. It is remarkable how much institutions have changed in this area: it used to be the case that seminaries would actively recruit to teach at seminary reflective fruitful pastors who may not necessarily have the degrees, and then provide the means for these pastors to gain the necessary qualifications.[45]

***Provide greater variety and option in the institution.*** Within the institutional courses of study give greater flexibility of course electives within degree programs. Recognize and give credit for valid learning experiences in parallel to the seminary—internships, reflective practice, and so on.

***Team teaching.*** Encourage instructors to develop integrative courses and seminars that are team taught, thereby modeling team ministry and integrative skills in thinking and practice.[46]

***De-emphasize grades.***[47] Limit the number of assignments for which grades are given. Ensure that all corrected work focuses on helping the student learn and grow rather than simply strive to do what needs to be done to get a grade. If possible, move away from a tight grading system to alternate assessment procedures, particularly learning-outcome assessment. Perhaps focus on mastery learning which requires students to acquire excellence before being passed: if the student does not reach the standard of at least B+, the course is recorded as incomplete until the standard of excellence is reached. Sometimes I hear the argument that grades are necessary if students are to continue on to higher studies. Such a belief is fallacious: many universities, including such prestigious institutions as Harvard and Brown, are receiving and accepting a growing number of students whose applications contain no grades whatsoever.[48]

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[45] The negative repercussions of the developing move from the pastor-teacher to the academician in the seminary are addressed at several points in John H. Leith, *Crisis in the Church: The Plight of Theological Education*, Louisville: WJK, 1997.

[46] Some specific examples are given in Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 177-178.

[47] A variety of suggestions is given in Alfie Kohn, *Punished by Rewards: The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999, 206-210.

[48] In fact Michael Goldberger of Brown University has commented that students who come with a dossier of work rather than simply an academic transcript "receive more time of review and they may, in fact, have more opportunities to impress the admission officer reviewing the file." Quoted in Kohn, *Punished by Rewards*, 359, fn 27.

*Integration of theory and practice.* Encourage and facilitate "sandwich" study (one term at school, one term in ministry) and/or internships, followed by opportunities for reflection through integrative seminars. Refuse to accept students fresh out of school or university, rather requiring at least two or three years of work in society as a prerequisite for ministerial training. Take classes out of the campus and into the workplace, meeting and reflecting with practitioners and applying the theory in practice.[49]

*Greater integration of the syllabus.* Why do students have to take five three-credit courses a semester? What prevents us from doing three five-credit integrated and team taught courses, or even providing one fifteen-credit course that involves total integration of the material? As far back as 1980 I experienced this approach personally when I did my graduate diploma in education at the University of New South Wales in Sydney: in the course of the one-year program of study there were only three courses— theory of education, curriculum, and practice teaching—the first two being team taught by the faculty, the third being a required ten weeks in schools with joint reflection by a supervising teacher and a professor from the university. It was a wonderful experience of holistic education. What a tragedy that while a secular institution has been engaging in holistic education for over twenty-five years, our theological institutions (which should be at the forefront of holistic education) are still bound into curricular fragmentation.

*Develop the curriculum from the purpose statement.* Begin with what is needed to accomplish our goal and develop courses accordingly: such courses as spiritual formation, spiritual theology, and peacemaking and reconciliation, would become core to our curriculum, as would a greater emphasis on ethics and ethical practice.

*Nurture spirituality in the classroom.* Encourage all instructors to teach in a spirit of prayer and humility, as a model of teaching and learning under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Acknowledge publicly and privately the presence of God in the classroom. While some may perceive this to be "unacademic," it is certainly not untheological![50] Rather than isolating academia from faith we should welcome their healthy interaction.

*Challenge students to live in obedience* to the theology they study. Perhaps reduce the content, and give more time to practical application of the key themes.

*Practical Critical Reflection.* Both through set assignments and in classroom discussion challenge and equip students to do critical reflection on real life situations. Relate the field of study synthetically with the practicalities of ministry and the implications for our daily lives, through case studies or reflection on field work or practical assignments.

Respond to *Differences in Learning Style*[51] by providing and even re-

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[49] Further suggestions for theory-practice integration are given in Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 177-179.

[50] Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Educa-*

*tion*, 202-203.

[51] For more on learning styles see Rita Dunn and Kenneth Dunn's *Teaching Elementary Students Through Their Individual Learning Styles*

quiring a variety of learning environments—through group project work, journaling, creative teaching methods, reflective field work, internship—the possibilities are only limited by our imaginations.

Conduct *integrative courses* or seminars.

*Involve students in the development of the curriculum*, course content, and/or assignments. In general a learner's commitment to work towards a learning goal is directly related to the sense of control he or she senses in the learning environment.

*Train faculty in education, communication, and motivation theory.* Being a good theologian does not make a person a good theological educator. But surely the holy calling to which we have been called demands as high a level of excellence in education as it does in theological reflection. Only when our instructors are effective holistic educators can we expect the emerging leaders entrusted to our care to become effective holistic educators. In particular we need to train our faculty to focus on learning, not teaching. When learning is empha-

sized, mastery rather than hurdle-jumping becomes the target.

*Train faculty in the use of creative methodology.*[52] Too many instructors are bound to a traditional lecture mode of instruction, without recognizing that more reflective and interactive approaches, such as small group discussion, forums, interviews, case studies, role plays, field trips, visuals, and so on have been consistently found to result in a far greater level of learning. Even those that are chained to a lecture methodology can learn to be better communicators.

*Develop cooperative assignments,* perhaps all-class assignments. Ensure that every class include at least one group work project as a means to promoting a cooperative rather than a competitive understanding of teaching and learning, and of ministry in general.

*Use inquiry teams* in the presentation of the material. At the beginning of a term students are presented with the key issues at stake in the course, and are asked to form teams to investigate these issues and present the material to the class. The

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*and Teaching Secondary Students Through Their Individual Learning Styles*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1992, 1993, Marlene LeFever, *Learning Styles: Reaching Everyone God Gave You to Teach*, Colorado Springs: Cook, 1995, and Bernice McCarthy, *About Learning*, Barrington: Excel, 1996. Similar issues are addressed in multiple intelligence research; see Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, New York: BasicBooks, 1983. Catering to variety in learning styles is particularly significant for those who are not Western, white, and male. For example, an increasing body of research has pointed to a fundamental difference between the ways men and women learn. See in particular Carol Gilligan's seminal work *In a Different Voice : Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Cam-

bridge: Harvard UP, 1982. Rebecca Chopp has suggested that the dominant academic model of theological education is the product of the dominance of white male voices in the structure of theological institutions (*Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education*, Louisville: WJK, 1995, 8-15). In light of the growing recognition of cultural differences in learning style (see for example Judith E. Lingenfelter and Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, Teaching Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Learning and Teaching, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003) it is imperative that multi-cultural theological education respond appropriately.

[52] A good start would be Marlene D. LeFever's popular text *Creative Teaching Methods*, Colorado Springs: Cook, 1985.

professor thereby becomes more a facilitator than an instructor.[53]

**Develop self-assessment strategies** that train students to be honest with themselves and to connect theory with practice, the target always being self-improvement and striving for excellence.[54]

**Use learning contracts** rather than set assignments. By so doing we affirm the learner's responsibility to learn.[55]

**Give the rationale for assignments.** Adults hate busy work and hurdle-jumping. They respond well when they understand the purpose of a required assignment. When they are told the reasons behind a learning task, students are more likely to respect the instructor as purposeful and learning-focused, and are more likely to be motivated, recognizing the value of what is being required.

## Conclusion

It is probable that your institution has already adopted some of these suggestions, but there is always more that can be done. The possibilities are only limited by our courage, imagination, and commitment.

The point is that as responsible theological educators we can no longer accept the status quo of a hidden curriculum that undermines the very essence of our purpose. The challenge is before us to give as much time to the intentional design of the hidden curriculum as we do to the explicit curriculum, and in particular to seek a holistic multi-dimensional approach to learning that alone can lead us on the path to excellence in curricular development.

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[53] Malcolm S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton III, and Richard A. Swanson, *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 6th ed., Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2005, 253-254.

[54] Raymond J. Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, rev. ed., San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999, 151-154.

[55] Knowles, et al., *The Adult Learner*, 265-271, Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 165-168, 280-283.