

Potential of Mentoring in Theological Seminaries

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Abstract

The goal of theological education is to prepare students for their careers. It does not stop there, however; a further goal of theological education is to enable students to live lives of purpose—thus not only to transfer knowledge to students, but also to channel knowledge into meaningful Christian service. Making connections between faith, living and learning is thus a primary purpose of theological education. These necessary connections are made between faculty, staff and students by establishing and maintaining mentoring relationships. Hence, this article considers the prospects of mentoring in theological seminaries with the aim of challenging seminaries to revisit the use of mentoring in the preparation of students.

Introduction

Discussions on teaching and learning within theological seminaries often center on the question of pedagogy. Seminaries are challenged to deal with a multitude of pedagogical suppositions emerging from increasingly diverse learning goals, and at the same time seminaries must also pay attention to the ways their students challenge an institution's core mission to train ministers for service in churches or denominations. This article draws on a doctoral study that critically evaluated mentoring in the theological seminaries in ECWA (Evangelical Church Winning All) (Chiroma, 2012). The research results of this study revealed that even though mentoring is in principle expected in theological seminaries, not many have

accepted and implemented mentoring as part of the teaching and learning process. Three central areas in which mentoring plays a role in theological seminaries have been identified, namely the areas of spiritual formation, character formation and ministry formation.

The theological framework guiding this article is the belief that theological seminaries are Christian communities that must look for ways to foster growth in their students, and, more so, that in the history of the church, mentoring relationships played a crucial role in developing and passing the faith from one generation to the next. The people of God have always continued in this tradition by engaging in some form of mentoring for the formation and preparation of godly servant-leaders for the communities in their generation. For this to continue it is necessary that seminaries revisit the prospect of mentoring in the teaching and learning process. Anderson and Reese (1999, 17-18), in their book *Spiritual Mentoring*, give the following reminder:

Spiritual formation, education of the heart, in other words, requires something more than traditional western forms of instruction. It requires a mentorship of the heart, a relationship with a teacher of life who is able to convey what was learned from the teacher's own faithful mentor, a way of life that is formed, not merely instructions that are given. We come to the realization that we need help, that we are not meant to make this journey solo. We learn to listen to the voices of mentors, not as absolute experts with the final authoritative word but more as the shrewd and discerning expression of those who have travelled this way before.

This article will look at the prospect of mentoring in theological seminaries. To accomplish this goal, the history of seminary education, the historical basis of mentoring in seminaries, Biblical-historical perspectives on the role of seminary training and education and the church, the place of mentoring in theological seminaries, and implications for theological seminaries will be considered.

Brief history of theological seminaries

Theological seminaries have a long and rich history that cannot be covered in the scope of this paper. The purpose here is rather to have a modest look at some of the pedagogical ideas that have guided theological education in some eras in history and their relationship to mentoring and formation of seminary students.

The first millennium

According to Lindbeck (1988, 30), throughout the first millennium of church history, the disciplines of "theology" and "spirituality" could not be readily distinguished. He argued that, beginning with Paul, those rated theologically com-

petent were also considered spiritually mature. For the majority of Christians during this era, the services of worship were their schools of the church and it was through these services that both religious seekers and Christians alike, including those destined to become overseers of the flock, learned of and grew in Christ (Bruggink, 1966, 3).

However, as Christianity began to compete with secular philosophies, specialized schools for inculcating Christian knowledge soon developed and just as a student in the classical philosophical tradition would attach him- or herself to an eminent philosopher to learn philosophical systems, so a Christian would seek out and attach him- or herself to a prominent Christian teacher, such as Clement (c. 150 – c. 215) or Origen (c. 185) (Horrell, 1978, 890). As early as the second century, catechistical schools became the form of Christian higher education for those wanting something more than what was available through the common worship of the church (Bruggink, 1966, 20). Suffice it to say, long before there were seminaries as such, teachers and students were engaged in theological education.

The catechistical schools evolved as they gradually adapted to changing cultural conditions and teacher personalities, with the result that theological education, as it was pursued during the first six centuries, became at least a pattern for what it is today (Holder, 1991, 17). In surveying this history further, Holder (1991, 17-18ff.) sets forth four models of theological education, represented by well-known and influential figures of the early church. Those four models help frame the discussion that follows, particularly as it relates to the prospect of mentoring in theological seminaries. Each model is indicated by a compound term describing at once its sociological location and primary pedagogical concern, followed by a brief description:

a. Origin of Alexandria: the academic/intellectual model

Origen became the head of the catechetical school of Alexandria in the third century and saw Christianity as a grand educational enterprise and intellectual activity, as the pathway into the ultimate mysteries of God. For him, the context of ministerial preparation was the school, the ideal teacher serving as tutor, and the successful student one who has an inquiring and well-informed mind.

b. Antony of Egypt: the monastic/spiritual model (around 271 AD)

Antony chose a reclusive life in the Egyptian desert, but so many disciples gathered around him that he was persuaded to serve as their spiritual guide. Students came to him seeking salvation and spiritual formation through mentoring in the context of what later came to be known as monasteries. Anthony would often sit to instruct his disciples, teaching them first to know blamelessly and without any ignorance the craftiness of the enemies to oppose them with the Lord's power. For it is written, "In God we shall have strength." Then he would interpret

for them the words of the divine scriptures, especially the deep and not easily comprehensible ones, and those about the Lord's incarnation, the cross, and resurrection (King, 1999, 23). To Antony and his followers, the ideal teacher was a spiritual guide and mentor, and the successful student was one who earnestly and whole-heartedly seeks full personal salvation and growth.

c. Augustine of Hippo: *ecclesial/vocational model*

Following his ordination as Bishop of Hippo in 395 AD, Augustine took the apostolic community at Jerusalem as model, gathering his clergy to live with him in his household. For Augustine, the context of ministerial preparation was the community of faith living in obedience to a common rule of life. As such he managed to establish some kind of community in his household, which he himself described as a "monastery of clerics" (Brown, 1990, 4). According to him, the ideal teacher was a pastoral leader and the successful student one who was wholly devoted to the common good of the community, putting that above his/her own interest. In his view, monastic living generated charity and pastoral zeal. Augustine's model differs from that of Antony in the understanding of the role of the teacher. While Anthony regarded the teacher as a spiritual guide and mentor, Augustine saw the teacher as a pastoral leader.

d. Gregory the Great: *the apostolic/practical model*

Even though coming from a monastic background, Gregory, even after consenting to become the Bishop of Rome in 590, always maintained a burning zeal for evangelism by sending emissaries to distant lands. He considered the ideal context of ministerial training participation as the ongoing mission of the church, with the teacher serving as supervisor of that experience. For him, the successful student was one filled with apostolic zeal, and thus miraculous signs were essential to Gregory's purpose (Holder, 1991, 16).

The above four models representing different streams in the early history of the church portray various tensions that are also widespread in modern seminary education. The models also serve as poignant reminders that such weighty questions about the role of seminaries in mentoring and holistic formation cannot be answered by church history alone but by the combination of various factors that will be discussed in the following sections of this article.

The second millennium

The second millennium, which saw the rise of scholasticism and the foundation of universities, brought a growing differentiation between theology and spirituality. According to Conway (1998, 23), Christian thinkers during this era were confronted with the question: How are we to reconcile reason with revelation, science with faith, and philosophy with theology? The first apologists possessed no philosophy of their own. They had to deal with a secular world proud of its literature and its

philosophy, ready at any moment to flaunt its inheritance of wisdom in the face of ignorant Christians. In this regard, Taylor (1959, 313) stated that theology grew to become an academic discipline that could be studied apart from any deep regard for matters of personal spiritual maturity. It was within this environment that formal seminaries were instituted for the purpose of preparing clergy (Volz, 1989, 103). The first of these dates back to the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century, which established seminaries for the purpose of training Roman Catholic priests (Volz, 1989, 103). The first seminaries were isolated from the outside world as house colleges and emphasized moral and spiritual formation over theological knowledge or ecclesiastical tradition (Volz, 1989, 104) – some examples of such seminaries are the Reformed Theological Seminary in New Brunswick, New Jersey, which was established in 1784; and Saint Mary's seminary in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1791 – just to mention a few. The first Protestant seminary, according to Hinson (1986, 587), was opened in 1783 in New York City, when clergy training in godliness was also regarded as a key item in the Protestants' plan for church renewal. Clergy were also taught liberal arts education. Hinson (1986, 588) further argues that a case can be made that the roots of the current debate over the role of spirituality in seminary education are traceable to the divorce between theology and spirituality arising during this era.

It must be noted that although early Protestant and Catholic seminaries both emphasized development of piety in their students, efforts in Roman Catholic seminaries were founded with significantly different theological underpinnings than their Protestant counterparts. Emden (1936, 42-43) confirms that Catholic doctrines hold to an ontological distinction between priest and layman, which contrasts strongly with the Reformed/Calvinist concept of the priesthood of all believers. Whereas in Protestant thinking ordination is seen as a higher function of ministry, Catholic seminaries train what they believe is a different kind of reality that is found in the church's pew – the reality of many scholars and philosophers turning their focus and attention on the church. Historically, this has produced a divergence of both form and methodology among the representative seminaries of these two groups. According to Hancock (1992, 73), training in the Roman Catholic tradition, for example, generally emphasizes being at the expense of doing; this is seen in the fact that most Catholic seminaries today have full-time teams dedicated to the spiritual formation of candidates to the priesthood. Seemingly, Roman Catholics are more consistent in the expectation that their training institutions live up to the underlying purpose implied in the term seminary, which means seed-bed or nursery for spiritual formation and growth (Hancock, 1992, 73). Seminaries are then expected to succeed in order to offer fervent and proficient leadership for the ongoing renewal and outreach of the churches.

The Protestant seminary, on the other hand, has developed within its own

theological framework certain criteria that have strongly influenced the expectations of what a seminary should be and do. According to McNeil (1953, 193), two major doctrines are crucial in this regard. One is the Reformed/Calvinist assumption that the church is the primary locus of spiritual growth. Participation in the ongoing life of the Christian community has historically been considered the main vehicle for spiritual and ministerial formation. While Protestant seminaries may have always acknowledged their role in the faith life of their students, they may also have generally not understood themselves to be the primary place for holistic formation, even for the students who go there for ministry training (Hancock, 1992, 74).

The second doctrinal factor, in McNeil's (1953, 46) view – emanating from the Protestant Reformation which effectually downplayed the need to form persons for ministry – is the emphasis on volunteering in the process of faith development. This theological development in the wake of the Reformation resulted not only in the wholesale closing of monasteries but also the casting aside of a panoply of devotional aids (such as catechism and prayer books) which had served the faithful for centuries (Hinson, 2005, 587). Consequently, some Protestant seminaries arising from this culture saw relatively little need to train, encourage, and model personal faith development in their students other than that which they received from being part of the church.

Early years of the twentieth century

In the early years of the twentieth-century, seminaries began to associate themselves with universities, (e.g. Union Theological Seminary and Yale Divinity School), which were themselves experiencing a broadening culture of free investigation and reflection (Smith, 1966, 68). This new power of investigation and reflection, according to Smith (1966, 68), added an important purpose or reason for the existence of seminaries, namely the maintenance of the church as a viable intellectual and social institution (Volz, 1989, 106). This is important because of the shift and the various associations of seminaries with universities. The number of graduate seminaries, that is those requiring a baccalaureate degree from an accredited college, quadrupled during a thirty year period in Europe and North America (Smith, 1966, 68). Therefore, it could be argued that these factors, especially the move by seminaries into universities, helped further solidify the shift away from an emphasis on piety in seminary training. Perhaps in most traditions, the earliest schools began as pious communities of aspiring leaders withdrawing from the world to focus their attention on matters of spiritual formation. As discussed in the above section, the modern seminary was rapidly becoming a center of critical theological reflection devoted to training professional pastors to minister in an increasingly diverse, complex, and even religiously pluralistic society (Corwin, 1978, 9).

In becoming integrated with the wider education system of their day, seminaries soon adopted certain attributes of that system which also impacted the spiritual nurturing of their students. Progress came to be measured primarily through courses, grades and credits. Curricula became fragmented (due to the dichotomy between theology and other fields) and religion was studied as science (Voltz, 1989, 106). Divinity schools emphasized more and more the scholastic elements of clerical study, the Bible and church history theology – often to the exclusion of spiritual formation. As early as 1968 Hastings (1968, 421) argued that pressures from the secular education establishment further weakened the historical tie between spiritual formation and intellectual pursuits that had already been threatened for centuries. Corresponding with these trends in academia, ministry in Protestant churches, according to Bruins (1987, 187), was becoming more of a profession than a vocation, with the result that one's life, life-style, and call from God were becoming increasingly less significant in the overall task of ministry preparation that seminaries were expected to carry out.

From the foregoing, it becomes clear that the combined pressure of theological, historical and cultural trends has served to weaken the emphasis on mentoring and holistic formation that once played a central role in ministerial training in theological training. The discussion at this point turns to the historical overview of mentoring as part of theological training to the extent that it did exist or survived in different periods.

Historical basis of mentoring in seminaries

There is a strong historical basis for mentoring within religious traditions. Again, space and time will not allow for an exhaustive discussion. The discussion will, therefore, be limited here to the early monastic Christians of the East, as the example *par excellence* of the phenomenon in the Christian tradition. However, a critical look at most religious traditions will also reveal the concept of spiritual guides – for example gurus (Buddhism) or Hasidic masters (Jewish traditions) (English, 1996; 1991). Religious traditions have understood the need for wisdom figures to lead the way. Take for instance the desert Christian monastics of the fourth century in Egypt and Palestine. These monks and hermits were required to have a guide, an *abba* (male) or *amma* (female), and to remain close to them for life. The *abba* or *amma* provided direction not only in spiritual matters, but in all areas of life, such as bodily exercises and eating habits (Hausherr, 1990, 790). Insight into the mentoring given and received among the elders and their disciples at that time is accessible today primarily through the collection of sayings known as *The Apophthegmata Patrum* (The Sayings of the Fathers) (Ward, 1975). Their pithy sayings demonstrate that at the heart of the relationship were the words of

wisdom that the *abbas* and *ammas* adapted to meet the needs of each disciple.

Though not educated in a traditional sense, these *abbas* and *ammas* enjoyed a reputation for wisdom and for using this wisdom to mentor others. For example, The *Apophthegmata Patrum* (Silvanus, 3) offers the following depiction of this remarkable spiritual endeavor:

Another time his disciple Zacharias entered and found him in ecstasy with his hands stretched towards heaven. Closing the door, he went away. Coming at the sixth and the ninth hours he found him in the same state. At the tenth hour he knocked, entered, and found him at peace and said to him, "What has happened today, Father?" The latter replied, "I was ill today, my child." But the disciple seized his feet and said to him, "I will not let you go until you have told me what you have seen." The old man said, "I was taken up to heaven and I saw the glory of God and I stayed till now and now I have been sent away".

A foundational source of spirituality and holiness resulted from the efforts of the early monastics to reflect on Scripture and the Word, and integrate this reflection into their lives (Burton-Christie, 1993, 345). The *abbas* and *ammas* provided not only the Word, but also excellent role modeling. It is said among the Hermit monks that "A hermit senior did not demand obedience but taught by example" (King, 1999, 29). Psenhaisios, one of the monks recorded in the *Apophthegmata*, remembers that "our *abba*, Pachomius taught us by his actions and we were amazed by his lifestyle" (Ward, 1975, 1). Another form of mentoring in the East was the community rule or the guidance provided by the codified set of guidelines required for monastic community members and the leadership of the *hegemon*, or community leader (Rousseau, 1985, 60). Both the leader and the rule or code of behavior for the community provided structure for desert monasticism and encouraged the interdependence and mentorship of the monks by providing an enduring atmosphere of meaningful relationships. King (1999, 19) records that, even though monks were known as "those who live alone," they were nevertheless aware of the importance of contact with one another in a meaningful relationship. For those in Egypt, their early leader Anthony (c. 356) had given them a certain unity through his teaching and mentoring. Many of his protégés, in turn, acquired fame as teachers of the spiritual life. The monks of the Pachomian monasteries actually saw themselves as a *koinonia* – a single brotherhood.

It could be argued that the mentorship in the Early Christian East may hold wisdom for theological seminaries today. The importance attached to having an elder or mentor is significant for every era. The desert monks understood that mentorship was vital if initial and ongoing support for desert monasticism were to continue. The one-to-one interaction is important as a model for how mentoring might occur. Seminaries can also learn from the fact that the goal of mentoring in the desert was not to make the disciples replicas of the elder: "The

Fathers used to say that someone met Abba Silvanus one day and saw his face and body shining like an angel and he fell with his face to the ground. He said that others also had obtained this grace and ‘I don’t intend to make you look like me’” (Silvanus, 12). Every disciple received individualized advice and attention, and each was expected to spend time in his/her cell discerning its meaning. In every religious tradition there is a concern to pass on the past to the next generation, to welcome new members and to help in initiation (Kulik, 2004, 89). Therefore, Christian theological seminaries too may have to consider the concept of mentoring, not just as an academic exercise but as an avenue of promoting discipleship that will continue with the work. In light of the above discussion, the biblical perspective on the nature of education in seminaries will be worth exploring.

Biblical historical perspective on the role of seminary training/education and the church

At a basic level, since seminaries serve churches by helping to train the pastors who will lead them, the role of seminaries in mentoring and holistic formation cannot be separated easily from the church’s biblical constitution, its biblically defined responsibilities, and the biblical qualifications of those who oversee them. Neuhaus (1992, 10) echoes this well when he points out that one of the perennial challenges faced by theological education is how to provide students with a rigorous theological education that does not fundamentally alienate them from the people they are called to serve. McCarthy (2004, 223) states that seminaries are dependent on churches to identify likely candidates for professional training, and hence they work together in various ways to accomplish this goal. Ministerial students constitute the single largest pool of participants to seminary programs and, as he notes, in ATS (Association of Theological Schools) almost 60% of these students are in professional master’s programs. Churches are by far the major employers of these graduates, and are therefore key stake holders in the mission and purpose of theological seminaries. Therefore an important relationship exists between the church and theological seminaries, and it is also clear that theological seminaries and the church need each other.

At another level, however, God has provided spiritual leaders who share His burden for the maturity of His flock and who willingly enter into the labors necessary to bring this maturation about. In an extended passage on spiritual growth, Paul encourages his members to do all things for the edification of the body of Christ (1 Cor 14:26). Addison (2000, 8) adds that it can be said that faith communities themselves share in this responsibility for spiritual growth among their members. Individuals, pastors and the larger community, therefore, all have biblically valid roles in spiritual nurture. Responsibility begins at the level of one’s

individual walk with God, yet extends to the others in one's surrounding spiritual community. In relationship to the church's ministry to itself, as opposed to its purely evangelistic mandate, this is what the church is to be about at all times and in all of its various ramifications. "Whenever you come let all things be done for edification" (1 Cor 14:26). Hence, it could be argued that biblical historical pointers informing the process of holistic formation in any contextualization of the church at work could then justifiably be applied in the particular context of seminaries and the training they offer (Byrne, 1990, 31).

Potential of mentoring in theological seminaries today

Theological seminaries have issues to contend with that make them, for the most part, good candidates for mentoring programs. Banks (1999, 4), writing as a theological educator, observes that while theological education caters to a wide audience, and the number of lay participants is increasing. So far this has had little impact on its content and pedagogy. From a study conducted of 42 Roman Catholic seminaries in South America, Schuth (2000, 17-22) found that theological schools and seminaries contain a mixture of people, persuasion and belief. She discovered that approximately half of all the students have recently converted to Catholicism or have not been active in the church for much of their lives. This may well be the case in other seminaries or theological schools as well, and suggests a major challenge for those teaching these students, since faculty can no longer presume even a basic level of theological or religious knowledge. The increasing number of students who are not well grounded in Scripture or in their own tradition, together with those who may not be instructed in their mother tongue and who lack the essential language skills to study theology at a graduate level, has created a new educational environment. This was, for example, the case at Fuller Theological Seminary, an evangelical school in Southern California in America (McMurtie, 2000, 7). At the time the study was done, Fuller Theological Seminary had 2800 students from 125 denominations and 80 countries, and many of the students were even non-denominational second-career converts, suggesting that it is a challenging environment in which to work. Crow (2008, 96), citing the benefits of mentoring in theological seminaries, revealed a survey conducted by Archibald of Fuller Theological Seminary's School of Psychology regarding the retention rate of graduates from seminaries in the USA. The survey revealed that for every 100 seminary graduates who went into ministry, 40 stayed in the ministry beyond five years, and 20 were still in ministry 10 years later. There could be a number of reasons for this. But for the 20% of seminary graduates who did continue in ministry, one of the key factors was having a mentor.

In light of the above examples, it is not unexpected that Cetuk (1998, 49)

observes that, considering the realities of today's enrollment patterns in seminaries, one might expect people who have decided to become seminary students to experience even greater difficulty, given the magnitude of changes brought about in their lives by the decision to enter seminary. With these enrollment realities comes the daunting task of helping students align their lives and aims in life, because they often attend seminary for various reasons. Already almost two decades ago, 794 students entering 12 United Methodist seminaries in 1994 in America were asked to respond to a series of questions relating to their entry into seminary in a study conducted by Cetuk (1998, 51). The following results were gathered (the percentage represents yes responses):

- Experienced a call from God - 88%
- Desire to serve others - 77%
- Opportunity for service and growth - 75%
- Desire to make a difference in the life of the church - 71%
- Intellectual interest in religious/theological questions - 70%
- Experience of the community life of a local church - 58%
- Promise of spiritual fulfilment - 57%
- Desire to contribute to the cause of social justice - 53%
- Encouragement of clergy - 52%
- Experience of pastoral counselling/spiritual direction - 43%
- Desire to celebrate the sacraments - 43%
- Search for meaning - 43%
- Influence of family or spouse - 33%
- Desire to preserve traditions of the church - 31%
- Influence of friends - 23%
- Experience in campus Christian organization - 16%
- A major life event (e.g. a death, divorce) - 15%

Reasons for attending seminary, such as the above, must be discovered and explored while the student is still at the seminary, for it will bring to bear pressure on his or her ministry in powerful ways unless he/she has been helped (Cetuk, 1998, 52). For example, if a student with a strong desire for service for God as motivation for coming to the seminary is not helped through the formation processes (theological, ministerial, spiritual), he or she may end up getting frustrated while trying to discover in what specific area God wants him or her to serve. One of the roles of faculty members is to assist students by means of a mentoring relationship to think critically about their reasons for coming to seminary.

It can be argued that mentoring can provide access to the multiform skills and knowledge bases needed to address the areas of theological, spiritual and ministerial formation. For the purposes of theological education, the use of a mentor and protégé can be seen as an avenue to honor the complexity and the

intricacy of the dynamic relationships inherent in mentorship. Hence the mentoring relationship could be portrayed by the image of a guide and steward, through whom God remains at work. Creating and developing lives takes solid biblical perspective (Purcell, 1990, 407-408) – a concept that will be explored later in the section on the biblical basis for mentoring.

Accordingly, in some theological seminaries today it is recognized that students have special needs that can best be met by a mentoring program. One of the biggest issues the students face is that they come to such seminaries in order to eventually leave after their training (Sheldrake, 1998, 3), meaning that seminaries are transitional spaces, not lifetime homes. The question many students face in this transitional phase is often: “*Where am I?*” This question is closely connected to the issue of identity: “*Who am I and where should I be?*” (Elridge, 1995, 289). Engaging such questions requires a certain amount of support that a mentor may indeed be able to provide. In the case of ECWA seminaries, many of their students are younger and often high school leavers, with little life experience. For many of the latter, questions and issues of transition and identity are major matters that still need to be addressed. Sheldrake (1998, 5) further notes that there are cases where students struggle to come to terms with certain realities, such as the fact that students, their colleagues (their fellow students; their superiors) and their professors are just regular people. Many of the students expect to find the seminary to be a perfect place with saints and angels, and they are sometimes shocked to realize that the seminary actually is full of growing saints – people who are not perfect. In the guise of spiritual directors, faculty advisors, lecturers and others, mentors are often in a unique position to help students negotiate these issues – often outside the classroom setting.

It is hoped that when theological educators understand the opportunities that mentoring offers, they will be far better equipped to shape the lives of their students. Without this understanding, theological education may be reduced to programs and activities that have no higher calling than to make students feel content about their academic and professional lives. Cetuk (1998, 102) writes that:

In contributing to the education of the church’s leaders, the seminary has the opportunity and responsibility to contribute to the understanding of discipleship. This includes concern for deepening and clarifying the commitment to discipleship in ways that neither the scholarly study of the subject matter, nor the training skills has done. Ideally, much of the legitimate criticism of seminaries’ spiritual aridity will be dissipated when the curriculum is reordered to promote discipleship.

Neil (2003, 234) states that an alarmingly high number of persons in ministry today are wounded and in need of healing. To an unhealthy degree, they need

and expect their parishioners to provide the kind of loving acceptance they did not get elsewhere, amongst these, the seminary. Although one cannot hold the seminary alone responsible for students' sense of acceptance, some students do see the seminary as a home. This is the case because many students discover themselves through mentors who show interest in them, and through that they can live out their calling. As discussed above, a large number of students come to the seminary from troubled backgrounds of one kind or the other; hence, seminaries must seek ways to help them through mentoring.

In light of the above challenges faced by seminaries, it is not surprising that the ATS¹ standards for theological education state the following:

Every professional ministerial degree should view theological education as equipping students not only with intellectual competence in the fields of theology and the arts for ministry, but also with capacities of personal, moral, and spiritual maturity as well as leadership skills.

By mentioning this repertoire of skills, the standards reveal a commitment to an understanding of the task of theological education. This commitment invites a creative dialogue about the role of faculty members in facilitating this agenda in the theological school.

It is however important to note at this stage that, in as much as the seminary is expected to be a home for students, the students also take responsibility and ownership for their personal growth. Cetuk (1998, 15) rightly points out that the right metaphor to use when coming to the seminary is that of a journey and not that of a destination. By this she means that both the student and the seminary have a role to play in the student's spiritual journey, and the seminary is just a starting point of that journey – not the final destination.

However, ultimately the seminary does play a vital role in producing graduates that will meet the current needs of the church. Therefore, Chrispal's (2004, 36) warning should be heeded, namely that theological seminaries need to stop being factories churning out outdated models of graduates who are not equipped to handle the challenges and pressures of the postmodern world, and who may be considered outdated for ministry. Hence, seminaries need to return to the drawing board and design a radical new blend of training that includes mentoring.

1 More than 270 graduate schools of theology in the United States and Canada form The Association of Theological Schools. Member schools conduct post-baccalaureate professional and academic degree programs to educate persons for the practice of ministry and for teaching and research in the theological disciplines. These schools differ from one another in deep and significant ways, but through their membership in ATS, they demonstrate a commitment to shared values about what constitutes good theological education. Collectively, ATS member schools enroll approximately 74,500 students and employ more than 7,200 faculty and administrators (www.ats.edu)

Implications for theological seminaries

The endorsement of mentorship in theological schools needs to be approached with great intentionality and professionalism. From the foregoing it is clear that seminaries must be the bedrock of mentoring students towards holistic formation. English and Bowman (2001, 37-52) offer several reasons as to why theological seminaries should pursue mentoring with all intentionality. Firstly, theological seminaries are distinct educational environments that have their own guidelines to follow. Their purpose by and large is to prepare people to work in a variety of spheres of ministry and contexts.

Secondly, in the past theological seminaries, particularly those connected to universities and graduate schools of theology, often saw their mandate as primarily cognitive development. The difficulties of incorporating a spiritual practice such as mentoring into an educational institution are cast in sharp relief in Van den Blink's (1999, 9) account of the death of spirituality in a Protestant theological seminary. Although it would seem reasonable to assume that there would be an emphasis on spirituality in a seminary, most theological students can confirm that the integration of spirituality in theological studies is not guaranteed. Van den Blink (1999, 10) observes that "students and faculty in practical theology know they are treated with disregard by those who have intellectual pursuits such as Scripture study". His observation is that ministry is seen as a place for those who are not academically gifted enough to engage in doctoral studies. This attitude points to the complexity of mentoring in a theological setting. How do those who have pursued theology as an academic career serve as mentors for those who are preparing for ministry?

Thirdly, there is a need to invalidate the personal/professional and theory/practice dichotomies that permeate theological seminaries – not only the recent dichotomies, but also those in the early centuries, as indicated above. Usher, Bryant and Johnston (1997, 12) and other contemporary writers such as Tracy (1988, 235) point out that artificial barriers in the form of dualism and dichotomies in seminaries are problematic in that they prevent seminaries from holding the personal and professional in tension. In many countries, post-modernity – the context in which theological training takes place today – has low tolerance for the rigid divisions between discipline and method, the personal and professional, theory and practice. Mentoring is one way of honoring the intersections of the personal and professional, the theoretical and the practical. Mentoring in theological seminaries is an effective way of creating a balanced approach to education, of integrating lived experience, and of honoring the need to be welcomed and supported in study and teaching.

Therefore, from the above discussion, mentoring in any context requires a deep appreciation of that particular context. It requires that we look closely at the issues

that confront us and that we look at where we are going with mentoring. The context of training in theological training must be related to the context of the people being trained. If one of the purposes of the theological seminary is to aid in the contextual holistic formation of the person who is to be the minister, the shift in theological education must continue to include a renewed focus on the person and not merely on the dispensing of information (McKinney, 2003, 140). Schroeder (1993, 35) puts it more succinctly when he says that, as academics entrusted with the spiritual nurturing of the next generation of Christian leaders,

we must learn to present a more biblically based model of Christian discipleship and godliness, and provide a way of striving toward such spiritual maturity. Christian faculty members are being distinguished from secular faculty members by being disciple makers.

A further indication of the need for mentoring in theological training derives from an understanding of the contextual ministry for which the students are preparing. Since seminaries are the institutions charged with the training of individuals for vocational ministry in various contexts, it would seem that the task should focus on developmental qualities in addition to academic training. Engstrom (1989, x) warns that if the education that is used to train the students does not provide the foundation for a personal contextual ministry through both instruction and modeling, students could be misled or find themselves “underdeveloped” in this area. What one was taught should be transferred into practice. It is hoped that students will put into practice what they were taught, but they often also put into practice the methods by which they were taught. If theological education is impersonal, the ministry of students who are trained in this type of impersonal environment may reflect the same approach to ministry. Through mentoring, the gap between theory and practice can be bridged to create a more complete and balanced education.

Smith (2005, 1-28), arguing from the teaching-learning perspective, points to the fact that faculty mentors’ tasks might include a self-evaluation for mentor readiness, participation in training sessions, involvement with students through the mentoring process of the course and an evaluation of the program at the end. Smith (2005, 1-28) further notes the challenges that faculty mentors face: first of all, the mentoring environment may provide an opportunity for a more personal relationship between students and the faculty member. The faculty member whose life is open to students in the mentoring process is subject to close scrutiny by the students with whom he or she is working. Providing leadership in a spiritual mentoring environment places the mentor in the role of lead-learner. Consequently, the faculty member needs to understand and accept the role of mentoring as a part of the ministry of teaching, and intentionally approach the task of informal and formal nurturing of students. Most theological seminaries

adopt a more formal mentoring process through faculty-led spiritual formation groups. More student mentoring may be encouraged by faculty on a more informal level (Thayer, 1995, 256).

Finally, since spirituality, formation and growth lie at the heart of the Christian faith, as explained by Naidoo (2005, 21), “understanding spiritual formation as developmental allows Christians not to despair when they realize that they are on a lifelong journey. It creates increased self-responsibility as we realize that we are called to an ever growing personal faith.” So then spiritual formation must be an integral part of seminary training. Furthermore, since humans are created to be in relationships according to God’s purpose, the seminary provides wonderful opportunities for relationships where learning can come about through both classroom instruction and through outside demonstration using mentoring as a tool. Seminaries must hone, shape and polish spiritual formation of students through mentoring.

Conclusion

The contemporary struggle for theological education at the level of preparation of the clergy for ministry and for holistic formation is an ancient one, as indicated by both the history of theological education and the prospect of mentoring in theological seminaries. The simple way to describe it is to listen carefully to John 14:6: “*I am the way, the truth, and the life...*”. Theological education which gives maximum attention to the “Way” of Christ stresses relational integrity with God and persons as He demonstrated with His disciples. We have seen that there is a long tradition (in both seminaries and monasteries) inherent in theological education that lays the foundation to make provision for the future through holistic formation and mentoring. 2 Timothy 2:2 embraces four generations of Christian teachers, and Paul places upon the shoulders of Timothy the task of continuity through mentoring: “*and the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men (women) who will also be qualified to teach others.*” In principle, training for the ministry belongs to the ongoing work of the seminary. Danger, if not disaster, is not far away when training becomes isolated and starved of mentoring relationships, or as a mere intellectual exercise.

It is therefore important for theological seminaries in this era to rediscover ways to make use of mentoring as an essential tool for the holistic formation of their students. It is the right and privilege of every minister called by God to learn the joys and challenges of ministry in the context of meaningful mentoring relationships with God and with one another, as they live out their callings as representatives of God, as reminders of Jesus Christ, as instruments of the Holy Spirit, as emissaries of a local community of believers and, above all, as ministers of introduction to Jesus Christ, with whom to have a personal faith relationship that is eternal.

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Mogućnost mentorstva na teološkim učilištima

Sažetak

Cilj je teološke naobrazbe pripremiti studente za njihovu karijeru. Međutim, to nije kraj. Daljnji je cilj teološke naobrazbe osposobiti studente da žive životom ispunjenim svrhom, gdje neće samo prenositi znanje studentima nego će ih usmjeravati u korisnu kršćansku službu. Zato je osnovna svrha teološke naobrazbe otkrivanje poveznica između vjere, života i učenja. Ove nezaobilazne poveznice između profesora, osoblja i studenata stvaraju se uspostavljanjem i održavanjem mentorskih odnosa. Zbog toga se ovaj članak bavi razmatranjem potencijalnog mentorstva na teološkim učilištima, s ciljem da se teološka učilišta navedu da ponovno razmisle o uvođenju mentorstva u pripremu studenata.