

*ORO, ERGO SUM: THE PEDAGOGY OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION AMONG
PROTESTANT SEMINARIANS IN THE UNITED STATES: TOWARD A POST-
CARTESIAN FRAMEWORK*

by

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DEDICATION

For Madison, my little sunshine.

Any expression of gratitude will fail.

Nevertheless, thank you. For everything.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	x
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Conformed to Christ: Two Test Cases of Christian Character	1
The Problem of Spiritual Formation: A History and Definition	4
The impact of the justification debates on spiritual formation in the West.....	4
Epistemological shifts and the loss of the spiritual Seminary education and spiritual formation in a post-modern world	7
Problem Statement.....	9
Spiritual Formation: A Definition.....	11
Situating the Researcher	12
Research Questions and Why this Study Matters	13
Overview of Research.....	15
Significance of the Study	16
Scope of the study	19
Term list	19
Term list	20
II. LITERATURE REVIEW	22
Introduction.....	22
Modernity, Postmodernity, and Spiritual Formation	24
Spiritual Formation and Theological Education	28
Formal Christian theological education in the middle ages.....	28
Renaissance and Reformation formal theological education	33
Modern (and postmodern) formal theological education affecting spiritual formation	35
The fracturing of knowledge.....	36
Professionalization and seminary education	37

(Post)modern reform efforts in theological education	38
Spirituality for the church and the seminary: reclaiming an ancient model in dialogue with contemporary voices	39
III. METHODOLOGY	43
Introduction.....	43
Qualitative Research and Scientific Investigation	44
Specific Form of Qualitative Research for this Study: Phenomenology, Spiritual Autobiography, and Participant as Observer	49
Phenomenology as method of investigation	49
Spiritual autobiography as knowledge creation.....	53
Participant as observer	55
Positioning the Researcher.....	56
Research Design.....	58
The <i>Confessions</i> and spiritual autobiography	58
Presentations and discussions as participant observer	60
Participants.....	61
Collection of Data	62
Researcher's Journal	62
Spiritual Autobiographies	63
Group Interviews	63
Data Analysis.....	66
Trustworthiness and Credibility.....	67
Ethical Considerations	68
IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS	70
Theoretical Orientation	70
Spiritual formation and the de-centered self.....	72
Three aspects of lasting personal change.....	73
Description of Participants.....	77
My spiritual journey.....	78
John Mark	94
Phoebe.....	99
Stephen.....	104
Timothy.....	107
Summary of Findings.....	108
Themes drawn from data	108
The importance of community.....	109
The importance of the “epistemological shudder”.....	114

The importance of mentoring into praxis.....	119
Lasting spiritual formation in the experience of seminary	122
Ideas	122
Habits/Practices.....	123
Social integration	124
Conclusion	124
V. USE OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS	126
Conclusions.....	126
What we're up against	126
Findings of this study as points for seminary improvement	132
Areas of Seminary Education that Must Change.....	133
Cultural changes.....	133
Community	135
"Epistemological shudders"	137
Mentoring	141
Cultural change: conclusion	143
Pedagogical changes.....	144
Community	145
"Epistemological shudders"	148
Mentoring	150
Pedagogical changes: conclusion	153
Limitations of the Study.....	153
Further Research	154
Toward an Integrated, Spiritually Formative Pedagogy	155
REFERENCES	157

ABSTRACT

Contemporary Protestant seminaries have been built, largely, on the university model established in Berlin in the 19th century, especially with its commitment to Enlightenment epistemology and its rejection of spirituality (and subjectivity) as knowledge. As such, these seminaries are often thoroughly modernist institutions, grounded in a positivist and “scientist” mode of knowing grounded in Cartesian epistemology. Students in seminary often find the process devoid of spiritually formative experiences insofar as seminary education tends to value rational, intellectual knowledge and devalue experiential, spiritual knowledge.

This study seeks to describe and understand the experience of spiritual formation by seminary graduates currently involved in ministry. It seeks to do so using the tools of phenomenological study in order to describe and thicken as possible the ways in which the participants experienced spiritual formation, both within and without their lives in seminary. The study employs spiritual autobiography, akin to autoethnography and *testimonio*, in order to facilitate participants’ description of these formative moments in their spiritual lives.

Engaging the data from the standpoint of critical realism as a theoretical framework, the study attempts to interweave the participants’ experiences with literature surrounding spiritual formation and seminary education in order to provide a holistic examination of the ways in which seminary education, with its commitment to Cartesian

epistemology as well as Enlightenment commitments to rational ways of knowing, has facilitated or discouraged spiritual formation.

The hope of the study is to offer insight into ways in which seminaries, as institutions thoroughly grounded in modernity, might adapt to a post-modern age and offer a course truly transformative study for students seeking to be spiritually formed into the *imago dei*.

CHAPTER I

I want to *know* Christ
and the power of his resurrection
and the fellowship of his sufferings,
becoming like him in his death,
and somehow, to attain to the resurrection of the dead.
Philippians 3:10–11 (NIV)

INTRODUCTION

Conformed to Christ: Two test cases of Christian character

In 1979, Philip Hallie, an ethicist (and former artilleryman) brought to print his monograph *Lest innocent blood be shed: The story of the village of Le Chambon and how goodness happened there*. At the time, Hallie had been researching systematic human cruelty and resistance to it—from the experiences of Native Americans and African Americans in the antebellum South to the Soviet and Nazi practices of state-enforced cruelty. His research of course had great impact on him, and Hallie (1994) explains that “Somehow over the years I had dug myself into Hell, and I had forgotten redemption, had forgotten the possibility of escape” (p. 2). He had attempted to approach the problem “objectively,” trying to distance himself from the emotions of the readings and simply provide a documentary account of these events.

At this point, though, Hallie (1994) recounts his discovery of the story of a small village in southern France that—though obscured from history by the fog of World War II—stood as a towering example of Christian moral and spiritual fortitude. He explains that the story of Le Chambon went through him “like a spear” (p. 3) as he envisioned the Chambonnais risking their own lives in order to hide and protect Jewish refugees who had come to them for escape from the Nazi and Vichy governments.

The Huguenot Chambonnais, under the driven leadership and mentoring of their theologian-Pastor, André Trocmé, stood firmly against the Vichy and Nazi attempts to annihilate European Jewry in ways available to them. They did not wait for the body politic to respond to evil, they did so themselves, at a local level, within their community—they were faithful with what they had been given. They actively defied these governments' truly evil directives by offering harbor to those whom they sought to destroy. Indeed, the village became known as “a nest of Jews in Protestant country” (Hallie, 1994, p. 18), and the Chambonnais incurred the wrath of both the Vichy and Nazi governments before the war was over. Pastor Trocmé, along with the two other leaders in the village—Édouard Theis and Roger Darcissac—were interred in the concentration camp at Saint-Paul d'Eyjeaux for some time, though they would ultimately be spared transfer to the Nazi death camps.

Throughout his study, Hallie (1994) found himself fascinated by the response of the simple farmers and villagers of Le Chambon. In 1976 he made his way to the village to conduct extensive interviews with the survivors. He records his surprise at their constant response to the question of why they would risk their own lives on behalf of others they did not know. They expressed indignant surprise at any suggestion of moral praise in their actions. Hallie (1994) recalls that

In almost every interview I had with a Chambonnais ... there came a moment when he or she pulled back from me but looked firmly into my eyes and said, “How can you call us good? We were doing what had to be done. Who else could help them? And what has all this to do with goodness? Things had to be done, that's all, and we happened to be there to do them. You must understand that it

was the most *natural* thing in the world to help these people” (p. 21, emphasis mine).

Hallie’s question is clear: what is it in the background and formation of these simple villagers and their dedicated Pastors that led them to *naturally* resist the institutional evil that threatened them with death if they did not conform? The response of the villagers at Le Chambon-sur-Lignon was, essentially, who wouldn’t act in this way?

In contrast to this story, Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon (1989) relate the story of a town in the United States in the 1960s that was fiercely resisting integration. At a called meeting to discuss tactics for resisting integration of the local high school, the pastor of the local Baptist church stood and took the podium after listening to the discussion. Hauerwas and Willimon (1989) relate that

The pastor, who had served in that congregation, in that community, for decades, spoke in deliberate, grave tones. “I am ashamed. I am ashamed. I have labored here for many years. I have baptized, preached to, and counseled many in this room. I might have thought that my preaching of the gospel had done some good. But tonight I think differently. I cannot speak to those who are not of my congregation, but to those who are, I can only say that I am hurt and ashamed of you and might have expected more” (p. 111).

Following this, the meeting continued awkwardly, with members of the pastor’s congregation slowly following his lead and filing out. Ultimately, Hauerwas and Willimon write, integration of the school was accomplished quietly within two weeks.

The differences in the initial responses of congregants serve to introduce the main questions driving this study. The question of my study is similar to Hallie’s (1994): *why*

do some Christians resist formalized evil, exhibited especially in the form of oppression and injustice, while others find themselves either actively or passively participating in it? More importantly, *how* do we, as leaders in churches (and especially seminaries), teach our congregations to integrate the gospel's transformative power for justice? What spiritual practices and experiences impart this transformation?

The Problem of Spiritual Formation: A History and Definition

The impact of the justification debates on spiritual formation in the West.

There are, of course, several difficulties in addressing this question. Perhaps the greatest challenge to spiritual formation in the West is, ironically, the centrality of the doctrine of justification in the Western church. The doctrine of justification is vitally important for Eastern Christians, of course. Yet in many ways it has become the central point of reflection and thus contention in the West, especially during and following the Reformation. Indeed, though the question had been of importance to the church since the time of Augustine and his debates with Pelagius, the 16th century Reformation focused the attention of the church's theologians doggedly on questions surrounding the problem of how human beings were set in right relationship with God through Christ—specifically whose action was involved. Though the children of the Reformation—all of the various denominations of Western Christianity—have various grievances with the Roman Catholic Church (e.g. Papal infallibility and primacy, Marian devotion, etc.), it may be argued that the central focus of schism began as and remains the question of human responsibility in justification.

In later manifestations, particularly among Evangelicalism, the gospel came to be seen as almost solely a means of salvation, so that the proclamation of churches in this

tradition centered on “getting saved” and “going to heaven.” The Evangelical focus on the exclusive working of God in the salvation of humans, leaving humans with only the call to faith (*sola fidei*), is a major factor which led to a collapsing of the categories of justification and sanctification—of salvation and conversion. The gospel of Jesus Christ—the story of God’s redemption of human life, of freeing humans from the destructive power of self-focused sin toward true transformation into the image and character of God through Jesus Christ—is thus truncated to little more than escape of eschatological judgment. Transformation of human character into Christlikeness is an afterthought. Even for theological traditions with strong emphases on moral uprightness, living the Christian life is seen as little more than a way of attaining “eternal life,” and thus has little transformative power.

In reaction to “conservative” Christianity’s focus on atonement, progressive Christianity advances the idea that the gospel is meant to stir social transformation in order to eliminate social injustice and evil. As I will argue below, there is certainly an element of the gospel that will inevitably bring about social transformation. However, to make this the heart of the Christian gospel over against the singular emphasis on salvation is essentially to argue for the other side of the coin: there is lacking in either side of this debate a theological development of the possibility of personal transformation, of the drawing of one’s life closer to the image of Christ.

As Dallas Willard (1998) explains,

History has brought us to a point where the Christian message is thought to be *essentially* concerned *only* with how to deal with sin: with wrongdoing or wrong-

being and its effects. Life, our actual existence, is not included in what is now presented as the heart of the Christian message... (p. 41).

The gospel, then, is robbed of its transformative power for individuals and the story at the heart of the gospel—a loving God who created humankind in his image and offers reconciliation and freedom in Christ—is subsumed by the stories of conservative and progressive elements of the church pushing a political agenda rather than personal transformation.

Willard (1998) continues,

When we examine the broad spectrum of Christian proclamation and practice, we see that the only thing made essential on the right wing of Christian theology is forgiveness of the individual's sins. On the left it is the removal of social or structural evils. The current gospel then becomes a gospel of "sin management." Transformation of life and character is *no* part of the redemptive message. Moment-to-moment human reality in its depths is not the arena of faith and eternal living. ...

What right and left have in common is that neither group lays down a coherent framework of knowledge and practical direction adequate to personal transformation toward the abundance and obedience emphasized in the New Testament, with a corresponding redemption of ordinary life. What is taught as the essential message about Jesus has no natural connection to entering a life of discipleship with him. (pp. 41-42).

Epistemological shifts and the loss of the spiritual.

A second, equally important, factor in the disappearance of spiritual formation in churches and seminaries is to be found in the revolutions in epistemology brought through the so-called “Enlightenment,” especially in the impact of empiricism on American (and to a lesser extent all of Western) epistemology. Prior to the enlightenment, the primary field of engagement in philosophical reflection had been ontology. As Willard (2000) and Taylor (1992, 2007) note, since Hume, at least, the center of ethical (and philosophical) reflection has become epistemology. In Great Britain and the United States, this means that, chiefly, empiricism has become the epistemological centerpiece and thus the heart of philosophical reflection regarding knowledge is empirically verifiable phenomena.

Empiricism, with its commitment to knowledge as only being attainable through sense-perception and interpretation, effectively shifted the ideas of soul and spirit, of religion and art and (to some extent) even philosophy—metaphysics—beyond the realm of knowledge (and thus investigation; cf. Willard, 2009). This move would have major effect on teaching in seminaries and the understanding of spiritual formation, especially when taken in pair with Evangelicalism’s emphases regarding justification as the central tenet of Christian doctrine.

This shift in epistemology ultimately would lead, across the board in education, to the emphasis on the passing on of content. “Science” and “scientific” became central to the very idea of what would be considered knowledge, and such things that are not empirically verifiable were rejected as fields of scientific study—metaphysics, religion,

art, morality, and similar fields of human endeavor were relegated to mere speculation (cf. Willard, 1995).

In religious studies, this meant the rise of the scientific method of study being applied to history, theology, and the text of the Bible. Higher criticism and the history of religion replaced devotional study in the academy and the seminary alike, and seminarians graduated with a greater understanding of the history of the production of the text and the “evolution” of the Christian faith than its transformative power or social calling. Rather than engage in the “speculative” work of considering ways in which the Bible (and the faith) called and enabled Christians to conform themselves to the image of Christ, seminarians expounded on the synoptic problem or engaged in demythologizing the text. In this environment, seminaries lost the meaning of spiritual formation and the ability to shape students’ spiritual lives in community into the character of Christ.

The reaction by conservative Christians and seminaries to these “advances” in the scientific study of religion culminated in fundamentalism (cf. Marsden, 2006), which offered “scientific” defenses of the faith, again to the detriment of its transformative power. The entire modernist/fundamentalist controversy, which largely defined the 20th century in terms of theological struggles in the United States, was an epistemological battleground; that is, the conflict largely centered on what could or could not be known in light of scientific (empirical) conclusions.

In the second half of the 20th century, however, the firm grip of modernism—with its ideas of human “progress” and “evolution” through scientific method—was found to be wanting. Philosophers and society began to reject the notion of “objective” knowledge

gained separately from human experience, and began to see experience itself as a form of knowledge (taking up a renewed interest in Husserl and his students; cf. Willard, 1995).

In addition to the rejection of modernism, the post-modern world heralded a new interest in “spirituality,” in that part of being human which transcends the purely biological. Certainly the Christian world has gained much from this interest, but unfortunately the rise of the “spiritual” has not seen a concomitant rise in Christians living out their Christian confession. Christian spirituality, like most of the pop-spirituality in American culture, has become little more than self-help pabulum, driven by what Christian Smith (2005) has termed “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism” (pp. 188ff). Were one to browse the “spirituality” section in a Christian bookstore, one is much more likely to find books such as Osteen’s (2007) *Your best life now* than the *Rule of St. Benedict*.

Seminary education and spiritual formation in a post-modern world

As noted above, education in many churches and seminaries, in the modern world, became an exercise in content transfer. Of fundamental importance to education, in both liberal and conservative circles, was to be *right*, rather than (necessarily) to be *good*. This is perhaps inevitable in a denominational world, but it is in stark contrast to the founding mission of the church. For the first few centuries of the Christian movement, standing firmly within the Judeo-Christian prophetic tradition, the church was a deviant institution. Here the barriers of race and class and sex were torn down in perhaps the most subversive texts ever written (cf. Lopez, 2005). In their catechisms, which closely mirror the definition of spiritual foundation operative in this paper, Christians were called to bring their lives into conformity with the example of Christ, exhibiting his character as

manifested in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–26), and continuing his prophetic mission of liberation of the poor and marginalized (Freire, 1984b) for the Kingdom of God.

In light of this, the education office of the church was deeply concerned with what today is often referred to as spiritual formation. Catechumens were certainly instructed in the doctrines of the church, but this instruction was intended to produce much more than simply right-thinking. Catechetical instruction, like the philosophical instruction that preceded it in the Greco-Roman world, was intended to draw catechumens into a way of living (Nussbaum, 2001). Conversion in the early church consisted of being drawn into the story of God and becoming agents of his work toward justice and peace (*shalom*) in the world (Napier, 2013b).

After the church became an established institution, education of clergy developed new social significance. Seminaries were first established in the Roman Catholic Church to train parish priests in the proper handling of the sacraments and in pastoral care for their congregations (Gonzalez, 2010). In addition, this holistic model of seminary education established a number of spiritual disciplines drawn from monastic practices—prayer, meditation, scripture reading, acts of service, the liturgy of the hours—designed to draw seminarians more deeply into union with Christ. For the early church, this knowledge of Christ went beyond the merely rational. To *know* Christ was to live Christ (Freire, 1984a), and seminary education, with its rational and experiential elements, was meant to draw the clergy ever more deeply into this knowledge.

As the church became dominant in the Roman Empire, however, it began to abandon its mission of participation in the coming of the Kingdom of God. As it became more institutionalized, it became more deeply entrenched in the status quo, and through

the middle ages it exercised temporal power in a defensive action of the norms of Roman culture (cf. Gonzalez, 2010). The 16th century Reformation was largely a response to this abuse of power. Unfortunately, however, the Reformation focused most of its energy on the minutiae of the doctrine of justification, and Christian education became an exercise in doctrinal hair-splitting rather than a process of conforming to the person and character of Christ. Because of this, Protestant seminary education became a matter of studying doctrine, and the spiritually formative exercises were largely ignored.

Problem Statement

This is of course a broad generalization, though it is difficult to deny that much of the epistemology of modernism remains operative in seminaries (not to mention universities) today. The problem in seminaries today, the problem which this study hopes to engage, is the difficulty of engaging students involved in academic study in the difficult and life-long process of conversion known as spiritual formation. Seminary graduates often find themselves unable to reflect the gospel in their lives apart from academic study (cf. Thielicke, 1962), and I have heard more than one graduate say (and have said myself) “it took me years to recover from seminary.”

Hallie’s (1979) question, then, is the question of this study: *why* do Christians around the world place themselves in danger for the sake of conforming their lives to the gospel demands of neighbor-love, and do so without thinking about it? More specifically, the questions of this study are: what is the pedagogy of spiritual formation that transformed these spiritually mature women and men into those who resist the evils of history, especially as they are perpetrated upon the marginalized and vulnerable?” And

how can we, as seminary educators, incorporate this transformational pedagogy into our curriculum and student/faculty life and lives?

Spiritual Formation: A Definition

At this point it is important to provide a working of spiritual formation (and its cognates). Spiritual formation is an often used and misunderstood concept in much of popular American Christianity. It is often viewed as a search for personal fulfillment with only internal implications—developing the spiritual life, drawing nearer to God, etc. Classically, however, spiritual formation in Christianity has meant to form the internal heart of a person into the character of Christ, and thus has major external implications. Spiritual disciplines—habits meant to draw Christians into the life of God, such as regular prayer, meditation, *lectio divina*, and the like—were meant, from the beginning, to produce fruit in the lives of believers. This fruit is nothing less than the incarnation of the gospel in the lives of believers. As Freire (1984b) explains,

[The incarnate Word] could never be learned if, at the same time, its meaning were not also grasped, and its meaning could not be grasped if it were not, also, incarnate in us. This is the basic invitation that Christ made, and continues to make to us, that we come to know the truth of this message through practicing it, down to the most minute detail....

I cannot know the Gospels if I take them simply as words that come to rest in me or if, seeing myself as empty, I try to fill myself with these words. This would be the way to bureaucratize the Word, to empty it, to deny it, to rob it of its eternal *coming to be* in order to turn it into a formal rite. On the contrary, I

understand the Gospels, well or badly, to the degree that, well or badly, I live them. (p. 547–548).

Dallas Willard (2005) has defined spiritual formation as “a Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self—our ‘spiritual’ side—in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.” To this he adds “In the degree to which such a spiritual transformation to inner Christlikeness is successful, the outer life of the individual will become a natural expression or outflow of the character and teachings of Jesus. We will simply ‘walk the walk,’ as we say”. Thus spiritual formation may be defined as a series of habits and practices that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, draw Christians closer to knowing the heart of the gospel through practicing it. These habits and practices of course include the habits of spirituality noted above, but also must include an element of service and community development as well as a pursuit of justice in the world in which Christians find themselves.

It is important, here, to note that spiritual formation in the Christian tradition is intended to draw Christians, through experience of the disciplines, more deeply into knowledge of Christ, moving from intentionality to fulfillment through the process of intuition (Willard, 1995). The disciplines are meant to provide more than simple spiritual fulfillment, they are meant to experientially draw Christians into the knowledge of Christ through the practice of habits and service.

Situating the Researcher

I am a child of the American Restoration Movement, a tradition that is in some ways the apex of enlightenment Christianity. This tradition, which my seminary exists to serve, was born in the post-Reformation environment in which Christianity was the

dominant religion—and indeed the dominant social force—of Western culture. It was a tradition founded largely on Lockean and Baconian thought, and thus Christian education became a matter of becoming right rather than becoming good (Hughes, 2008).

Though originally begun as an ecumenical movement, the American Restoration Movement (Churches of Christ, Disciples of Christ, and Independent Christian Churches) became hardened in its doctrine and viewed other Christian traditions with suspicion, especially the Roman Catholic Church. Any practice deemed “Catholic” was rejected, and this included the spiritual disciplines of the early seminaries.

Seminary education, such as it was, thus became an exercise in inculcating (supposed) right-thinking among those who would serve congregations as ministers, equipping them for arguing against other Christian traditions. Gone were the formative elements of seminary education designed to draw Christian clergy into union with Christ’s liberating project. Spiritual formation was replaced, in seminaries for Churches of Christ, with a rigid ideological education meant to impart a right understanding of Scripture. Indeed, perhaps the most important text of Scripture for Churches of Christ was 1 Timothy 2:15, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (KJV). This text came to be seen as something of a mission statement for Christian education for both those in the pew and the pulpit. To be “approved unto God” is to understand how one correctly reads and interprets Scripture, and thus education became (as noted above) largely about the proper interpretation of the Bible.

In this environment the seminary for which I work was established as a significantly maverick organization. Its faculty embraced and taught a higher-critical

approach to Scripture, as well as a far more nuanced view of church history and theology. Its mission was established to “promote knowledge, understanding, and practice of the Christian faith by equipping Christians and churches for service in the Kingdom of God.” From the beginning the seminary was true to the ecumenical vision of the original movement. Its student body was drawn from across denominational traditions, and its teaching embraced the principles of the simple, unadorned Christian faith as reflected in the gospel.

However, in many ways it continued the rational focus of seminary education, employing higher-criticism in Bible study and in rational theological reflection. This is certainly important, but to this day the seminary lacks any formal practices of spiritual formation (beyond a weekly chapel service). As Christianity in America is in decline, this presents the seminary with a unique opportunity to move beyond the cultural Christianity of Christendom and to reclaim the early Christian tradition of formative education—of drawing its students into knowledge of and union with Christ in his mission of promoting justice in a highly divided world rather than focusing solely on the development of rational expertise. In fact, if the seminary is to survive and accomplish its mission, it is vitally important to reclaim the practices of spiritual development found in the earliest Christian education.

As both a seminary graduate and a faculty member/librarian at a seminary, I bring a certain perspective to the study that offers unique insight into this matter.

Research Questions and Why this Study Matters

As seminaries attend to the question of how they might help students form into the image of Christ—that is, engage in spiritual formation—it is vitally important to

understand the pedagogy of spiritual formation. The question of this study is, broadly, “What is the pedagogy of spiritual formation that transformed spiritually mature women and men into those who *know* Christ, experientially, rationally, and practically?” This is the heart of the matter that lies behind other questions, such as “what is it that equips Christians to become those who, like the villagers of Le Chambon, resist the evils of history, especially as they are perpetrated upon the marginalized and vulnerable?” More specifically, the study seeks to address the following questions: 1) What experiences, habits, practices, relationships, and teaching strategies facilitated spiritual formation in the participants; 2) In what ways did seminary help and/or hinder spiritual formation in the participants?

Overview of Research

In order to address these questions I have engaged in an extensive review of the literature of Christian spiritual formation. There are two deep roots for these formative practices—rabbinic Judaism (2nd Temple) and the Greek philosophical schools, especially perhaps especially the Stoic schools . The latter of these is especially formative of the church’s spiritual formation development in the late classical and early medieval periods (cf. Malherbe, 1989; Thompson 2011, etc.).

The Greek philosophical schools were concerned with a much more holistic view of life than is often assigned to philosophy today. They were not only concerned with a systematic way of thinking of the world, but rather of coming to know, understand, and practice the *good* (cf. Marrou, 1982; Hadot, 2002). They developed a methodology of apprenticeship in community which was meant to help students and philosophers develop

an understanding of the good and then bring their lives into conformity with that understanding (cf. Nussbaum, 2001).

Christian spiritual formation also became about more than rational and systematic thought—though, as with the philosophers, these elements were certainly present; yet they were not the driving purpose of theology or spirituality. Christian spiritual formation became a process of discerning Christ, and becoming disciplined to him and mentored by him (cf. Kolbet, 2010).

All of this would change in the post-Enlightenment world. The cultural shifts of the Enlightenment are impossible to discuss in the limited space here. Suffice it to say, here, that Cartesian thought elevated epistemology to the central question of philosophy, and redefined reason as skepticism and calculation alone. It then defined reason and knowledge in such a way as to exclude many other legitimate ways of knowing—including mysticism and religious practices. Seminary education, in this environment, often became a process of rational, scientific thinking, and very often the formation of students into the character of Christ was largely ignored.

If seminaries are concerned to produce spiritual leaders in the twenty-first century, they must consider engaging students in a more holistic manner. The purpose of this study is to examine ways in which the participants in the study—seminary graduates involved in lay and professional ministry—have *experienced* spiritual formation in their lives. It is my hope that, over time, the study may prove helpful to seminary leaders—administration and faculty—as they examine institutional and pedagogical commitments in spiritually forming pastor-leaders into agents of spiritual transformation.

In order to explore the spiritually formative experiences of the participants thoroughly, it has been necessary to place modern seminary education within its historical and philosophical context. My literature review has thus presented something of a truncated history of Protestant seminary education as it has developed, especially following the development of the University of Berlin's department of theology.

I have also explored the development of a post-Cartesian philosophical anthropology in order to understand the development of human knowledge(s) that exist apart from—and prior to—Cartesian rationalism. I have drawn heavily from James K. A. Smith's (2009) argument for understanding humans as primarily affective, *desiring* animals rather than “thinking-things”, who *experience* the world primarily in embodied ways rather than as rational, disembodied intellects (p. 40). Insofar as experience is a first-order means of attaining knowledge, with reason as a second-order (though not unimportant) faculty, a seminary education built on Cartesian categories of knowledge will be ineffective at spiritually forming pastors. This study examines the spiritual formation of the participants at the interplay of experience and thought in order to suggest an integrative pedagogy.

In order to understand this experience and interplay, I proceeded upon a phenomenological study designed to describe as thickly as possible (Merriam, 2009, especially pp. 227ff) the spiritually formative events in the participants' lives. As a seminary graduate, I also engaged in an autoethnographic/participant observer role to provide contrast and insight as well.

In order to provide a framework for our co-analysis, I have explored the genre of “spiritual autobiography” in the literature review. Using these insights, participants wrote

a version of their own spiritual autobiography tracing their spiritual development. We began this process writing individually and then met as a group to discuss our spiritual autobiographies.

I recorded each group session and transcribed the discussions. For analysis, I coded the responses using a grid showing the intersection of the fruit of spiritual maturity with the events and teaching associated with it. Ultimately, I have attempted to offer thick, rich description of the transformative process of those involved in the study—which the literature suggests may take place *after* seminary rather than during seminary due to the content-based pedagogy of the institutions.

Significance of the Study

Protestant seminaries must examine their pedagogy in order to better understand ways in which they might offer transformative spiritual experience to students. This study offers insight into ways in which participants were spiritually formed in order to provide a framework for considering changes in pedagogical strategy—in the forms of habits, rituals, and practices, as well as modalities of instruction—in seminary education in a post-Cartesian world.

Scope of the Study

As seminaries clamor to develop spiritual formation programs in response to student needs in this area, I believe this analysis will reveal deep insight into ways in which seminaries might employ apprenticeships and develop communities in such a way as to offer a truly *transformative* experience to students.

Term List

Demythologizing: In biblical studies, Bultmann (1941) stands as the champion of demythologization: the process of separating reality from “myth” in the New Testament. Demythologization accepts wholesale the epistemological developments of the Enlightenment and Modernity. As such, it rejects as “myth” any depiction of events which occur outside of the natural universe as defined by Modern Western science. “Supernatural” events, so defined, must then be either rejected or interpreted metaphorically. To demythologize the text of Scripture, then, is to find the timeless truths behind the mythological stories of Scripture (for Bultmann, especially the New Testament).

Eschatology: A vision of the end (*telos*, or goal) of humanity and more broadly the natural world (creation). A Christian eschatology is the envisioning of the end (in the sense of both goal and conclusion) of both humans and creation as consummated by the God of Israel. A modernist eschatology (cf. p. 22) is the utopian “end of history” vision in which mankind (and it has been most often seen as *mankind*), through technological progress, overcomes the horror and terror of history (Bauckham & Hart, 1999; Middleton & Walsh, 1995).

Reflection: In its technical sense, as used in this study, reflection is the process of examining an experience critically, reflecting on one’s presuppositions and taken-for-granted beliefs in order to consider possible alternative interpretations and thus engage in deeper meaning- and knowledge-making (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985). Mezirow (1990) explains that critical reflection, as employed in adult education theory, is the examination of presupposition and the assumptions which underlie habitual action.

Spiritual Formation: As used in this study, spiritual formation refers to the Spirit-drive process of habits and practices which draw Christians more deeply into knowledge of Christ, thus shaping thoughts and practices into his image (Willard, 2005). This formation will be reflected outwardly, as well, that is, as Freire (1984b) and Willard (2005, et al.) explain, the spiritually formed Christian will exhibit Christ-like characteristics (cf. Gal 5:22–23), most sublimely in self-giving love of others.

Synoptic problem: A critical examination of the relationship between the Gospels in the New Testament of the Christian canon, involving detailed study of authorship, dating, and literary inter-relationship. The study examines similarities and differences between the first three Gospels (the synoptic Gospels) in order to understand the development of theological interpretations of the life of Jesus (cf. Sanders, 1989).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In order for this study to be conducted, an understanding of the historical, philosophical, and theological situation of contemporary theological education of the *self* must be developed. At the heart of any discussion of spiritual formation—which will be further defined below—is a working theory and model of the human self. It is the self that is formed through the pedagogy of spiritual formation. It is the self that must engage with ideas, thoughts, reflections; with practices, habits, rhythms; with social relationships and identity. It is the self that must engage in renegotiation in each of these areas through engagement with the gospel and—for Christian theology—the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (cf. Willard, 2010).

Insofar as theological seminaries attempt to equip students for service of Christ's church, understanding the self—as well as available pedagogies that facilitate spiritual formation—is vital for accomplishing this mission. As we will see, however, the fragmenting of knowledge in the modern academy—with its deepening specialization, its commitment to positivism, and implicit embrace of naturalism—has produced an environment of skepticism and even suspicion among seminary faculty and administrators regarding practices of spiritual formation (Jones, 1987). With the loss of trust in the modernist project now having largely spread throughout the academy (outside of the natural sciences) and taken root in the West (cf. Hicks, 2011; Middleton & Walsh, 1995), students and professionals are showing renewed interest in spirituality and transcendence (cf. English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003). In this environment, seminaries

must begin to reassess their institutional goals, structures, curricula, and pedagogies in order to address the needs of the contemporary church for ministers who are spiritually formed. This may especially be necessary in the current environment of suspicion of intelligentsia, for, as Jeffrey Greenman (2010) has explained, “many people (and sometimes even pastors or Christian leaders) assume that theology is an abstract, specialized discourse that attempts to tidy up a series of arcane, speculative propositions that have no inherent usefulness to anybody” (p. 33).

In order to address the question of the facilitating of spiritual formation in seminaries, it is necessary for me to begin with a discussion of human knowledge and of the human person (a philosophical anthropology) as understood through history, culminating in our modern and postmodern context. The theory of this literature review is that the protestant seminary, as currently configured (and especially in my own theological tradition), is a thoroughly modernist institution. As such, its commitments to a modernist epistemology and eschatology, in combination with its embrace of the doctrine of soteriology as central to Christianity, severely hamper and even make impossible the actual facilitation of spiritual formation.

Following a discussion of the history of the exclusion of spirituality as knowledge in modernity and attempts at reclamation of the spiritual in postmodernity, I will present a detailed theory of the person that will encompass a holistic theological understanding of humans as *spiritual* beings with spiritual longings (born out in much recent literature, cf. English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003).

I will outline the history of theological education and spiritual formation, highlighting especially the early formative practices of Christian education through the

medieval period. I will then trace several changes that occurred in the modern (and enlightenment) influenced university. These changes—including the fracturing of knowledge into the silos of the modern seminary, the development of professionalization, the embrace of positivism, etc.—have had dramatic and lasting effect on seminaries and have proved to be a detriment to spiritual formation.

Following this, I will address several promising developments in theological education for spiritual formation, drawing heavily from Robert Banks' (1999) important suggestions regarding the re-envisioning of theological education as a missional, transformational experience. I will synthesize several important teachings and discussions along these lines, including sources drawn from critical and Postmodern educational literature. From this, I will offer possible ways forward for seminaries looking to engage in spiritual formation.

Modernity, Postmodernity, and Spiritual Formation

In order to explore and ultimately understand “spiritual formation” as presented within this document, it is necessary to first present philosophical shifts which are vital to the fragmented (and continuously fragmenting, cf. Middleton & Walsh, 1995) narrative of the contemporary Western world, each of which has had impact on human anthropology and therefore spirituality. In describing epochal shifts—such as Modernism and Postmodernism—one inevitably must engage in over-generalization. Nevertheless, insofar as the ideologies present in each of these movements provide a vital backdrop to current understandings of the spiritual and thus spiritual formation, it is necessary to introduce the salient features for this study of each of these movements in regard to the understanding of the human person and human knowing.

Modernity and the person

It is notoriously difficult to date the beginning of the condition now referred to as modernity. Conventional thinking generally dates the birth of modernism to the eighteenth century Enlightenment. Middleton and Walsh (1995), however, argue that the seeds of the “spirit” of modernism date to the Italian Renaissance, and they proceed to offer the date of 1492, with Columbus’ “discovery” of America as the founding myth of North American modernity (p. 14). Due to its direct connections to Anglo-European colonialism and hegemony, this would seem to be an appropriate possibility for the beginnings of modernism. It seems clear, however, that the mature expression of modernist thought—as the largely unquestioned *truth*—is found in the eighteenth to early twentieth centuries in Europe and the mid-twentieth centuries in the United States (Bauckham & Hart, 1999; Middleton & Walsh, 1995; Hicks, 2011).

In its mature expression, modernity saw itself as throwing off the superstition of the past, and pictured mankind (and it was almost always *mankind*) as finally being liberated from the bindings of creation, tradition, and history (Middleton & Walsh, 1995; Christians, 2011). Reason reigned as the ultimate faculty of knowledge in modernity, defining knowledge as that which could be objectively known through scientific investigation, separated from the elements of culture, time, and place (Bauckham & Hart, 1999; Grenz, 1996; Christians, 2011). The metanarrative of modernity suggested that only that which could be known objectively and empirically could be considered knowledge, and relegated investigation of everything outside the bounds of the empirical sciences to the realm of opinion or preference (Christians, 2011; Middleton & Walsh, 1995; Willard, 1995). While this was understood to liberate *mankind* from the vagaries of

pre-modern speculation and offer a way beyond the oppressive bonds of tradition, time has shown that the metanarrative of scientific “progress” has been used for greater oppression (even world-domination) than any of its forebears (Middleton & Walsh, 1995; cf. Ramachandra, 2008).

In setting itself up against religion, then, science (through positivism) assumed the truth-making capacity of modernity, and the centuries of colonial expansion as well as the bloodiest century in history (the twentieth) testify to its effective control over the story of Western exceptionalism. This dedicated *faith* in the achievements of science is well evidenced in an address by the British-educated Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first prime minister:

[I]t is science *alone* that can solve the problems of hunger and poverty, of insanitation and literacy, of superstition and tradition, of vast resources running to waste, of a rich country inhabited by starving people.... The future belongs to science and to those who make friends with science (Ramachandra, 2008).

While one is not surprised to find such thinking in Britain’s crowning colonial achievement, it is shocking to witness the rejection—and even dismissal—of the thousands of years of India’s cultural and religious history from the mouth of its elected leader (Ramachandra, 2008). Ultimately, modernism’s breathtakingly hegemonic rejection of non-European “superstition,” as well as Europe’s own religious and cultural history, would provide some of the seeds for the coming revolt against epistemological imperialism found in postmodernism (Smith, 2006).

Anthropology, epistemology, and education, of course, are thoroughly intertwined. It is therefore difficult to overstate the impact of Modernist thinking on

education in the West. Middleton and Walsh (1995) raise Dewey as an example of modernist thinking in full bloom. They identify in Dewey's *Reconstruction in philosophy* four changes from the pre-modern period: a rejection of the supernatural; the empowerment of the individual *rational* mind (as opposed to ecclesiastical authority); a belief in the progress of humanity; and finally the scientific study of nature in order to subdue it for the use of society (p. 14). Middleton and Walsh (1995) state that

If we were to describe the overall cultural spirit or mood pervading Dewey's description of modernity, we would say that Dewey's modern "man" (the language is appropriately exclusivist) is self-assured and in control of his own destiny. This man knows what he knows and he knows it with certainty because he knows it scientifically.... Once he has liberated himself from past authorities and superstitions all he needs is the courage to follow his reason. With such courage and the employment of his rational abilities, he will, together with all other rational men, undoubtedly experience and enjoy the fruit of human progress (p. 14).

In this thought-environment, reflections on the soul and the spirit—even humanistic-oriented thinking—were considered beyond the realm of knowledge, and were largely abandoned to the speculations of theologians and philosophers. "Truth," so defined by modernist philosophers, was beyond the realm of such speculation and therefore had little or no place in the actual *politics* of human life (Middleton & Walsh, p. 15).

Seminaries and churches, rather than resisting these hegemonic claims to truth, often embraced them and reacted to the encroachment of "science" on knowledge in one

of two ways, as expressed in the Modernist/Fundamentalist conflicts of the early twentieth century (Marsden, 2006; Marsden, 2014).

Spiritual Formation and Theological Education¹

With the epistemological shifts noted above, it was perhaps inevitable that schools in the West adjusted to reflect this understanding of knowledge which privileged the modernist emphasis on rationality over experience and upon external knowledge rather than the “inner-life” of spirituality. Here I will trace developments in education in theological education in the West, especially since the founding of the German university system in the nineteenth century. These developments had far reaching impact, as the new German system was exported around the world through its training of foreign educators (Cannell, 2006).

Formal Christian Theological Education in the Middle Ages

It is difficult, of course, to trace the beginnings of what might be called formal theological education in Christianity. Certainly Christian catechetical practices functioned as something of a theological education, drawing catechumens into knowledge and practice of the faith (Napier, 2013b). Formal training for clergy, however, is more difficult to find exemplified. In the earliest days of the church, it seems as though those who were called to serve the church as clergy were formally educated in apprenticeship to the local bishop. By the 4th century CE, however, formal education was conducted in monasteries, where one would find, as Cannell (2006) explained, “a disciplined communal life, patterned after the communal life of the early church and expressed in service in the world” (p. 131). This communal, disciplined, reflective life of

¹ In this section I am greatly indebted to Linda Cannell’s (2006) book *Theological education matters: Leadership education for the church*, which provides a detailed

service was considered the “suitable context for the nurture of the spiritual life,” and in the monasteries students (the majority of whom were monks) learned the arts of “reading, writing, arithmetic, and basic doctrine—subjects considered necessary for the service of the church” (Cannell, 2006, p. 131). It is important to note the context here, though: students were trained in these disciplines as a part of the overall discipline of formation. These disciplines were not separated from the inner-life of the monasteries, but were rather integrated into a holistic approach to formal education meant to engage the students in formation into Christ. The reflective inner-life was an integral part of education, and thus rational/intellectual formation was not privileged over experiential and spiritual formation.

Cannell (2006) has explained that education in the monasteries generally focused on two areas: “the *schola interior* ... for those training for religious orders, and the *schola exterior* for clerics (who today would be lay ministers and clergy)” (p. 131). The *schola interior* focused on monastic practice, largely on the study of patristics and the Bible. Their biblical exegesis was thoroughly allegorical, which has drawn the ire of modern exegetes, but as Cannell (2006) explained, “clearly for the monastics the study of Scripture was at once an aesthetic, rational, and spiritual/mystical act” (p. 132; cf. especially Leclercq, 1982). The *schola exterior*, with its intention to equip clergy and lay ministers, generally offered education in the skills necessary for serving the church (cf. Cannell, 2006, etc.), including the handling of the sacraments, administrative skills, and other *technical* education. The study of arithmetic and the liberal arts in the cathedral schools was intended for service of the church, much as the study of the liberal arts in the monasteries was meant to improve and enhance Bible study.

As with so much of Christian theology and history, Augustine of Hippo (354-430) stood at the center of theological education in the church in the middle ages, as Christianity faced a new and different context (specifically the decline and rebirth of Christendom). McGinn (1994) pointed out that Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, with its encouragement to study the liberal arts and grammar in pursuit of understanding Scripture, would function as the major text for medieval education. Augustine had been trained in rhetoric and philosophy, and had been highly influenced by Manichaenism and Neo-Platonism in his early life, prior to his conversion to Christianity in 386 (cf. McWilliam, 2000). Augustine distinguished between two forms of education: *scientia* and *sapientia*, or *knowledge* and *wisdom* (Charry, 1997). For Augustine, neither *scientia* nor *sapientia* was capable of developing a "whole" person without the other, though *scientia* was understood as directing the person toward *sapientia* (Charry, 1997). Whereas in the modern world, the idea of knowledge is largely connected with rational interaction with facts and seen as an end in itself for human formation, Charry (1997) expressed that

the goal of *scientia* is to move the seeker to *sapientia*, wisdom. *Sapere* in Latin originally meant "to taste or smell things" and was carried into the cognitive realm to mean "to discern, think, or be wise." In the ancient world, knowing something implied tasting it—indeed, participating in it.... Augustine pressed Christians not just to celebrate what God has done for them but also to taste and enjoy God. And since the "essence" of God is justice, wisdom, love, and goodness, participation in these qualities *is* eternal life with God (p. 133).

For Augustine, then, the life of the mind was integrally connected to the life of the spirit and the expression of that inner-life in justice, wisdom, love, and goodness. The *telos* of Christian education—whether in formal education or in the myriad forms of informal education—was the formation of the Christian’s spirit into the image of the loving God of the gospel (Charry, 1997). The formation of the mind—the rational activities of intellectual knowledge making that is so privileged in education today—was but one part of this formation and was not the end of education (Napier, 2013). This dedication would be extended beyond the walls of the monastery in the following development in education as well.

Though the monasteries would continue to exist for centuries—and indeed remain to this day—they could not serve the function, ultimately, of educating clergy for a growing church in a radically changing world, due to their limited focus and hesitancy in adopting new methods of education and new knowledge (Cannell, 2006). The 5th century CE saw the rise of the cathedral school, which functioned to train clergy and lay leaders—men and women—for service to the church (Cannell, 2006). These would become more central to Western education later in the middle ages, and by the twelfth century they became the preferred places of instruction for people outside religious orders. This was largely because they offered an education that expanded beyond the boundaries of the limited scope of the monasteries (Cannell, 2006).

The cathedral schools are significant largely because they form the foundation of the scholastic universities, which in turn provide the immediate background for the modern university (Cannell, 2006). Cannell pointed out that a collection of disciplines in one place, as found in modern universities, is not *necessary*, and would not exist were it

not for the development of the late medieval scholastic universities. In fact, every marker of the modern university—from a course of studies to be completed, to a students selecting of a discipline to specialize in (among many), to the reception of a degree (title of honour) at completion—is born in the university of the middle ages (cf. Cannell, 2006).

Still, the universities of the late middle ages were holistic institutions. As European society came into contact with the broader world (through the Crusades, trade, etc.), the universities were forced to engage, integrate, and adapt to this newly (re) discovered knowledge. This knowledge—as can be seen with Aquinas’ engagement with Aristotle and his Islamic interpreters—was evaluated and appropriated in service of the Christian life of faith. However, due to an influx of students, the universities became more systematized and faculty developed rudimentary scholarly methods (Cannell, 2006). Additionally, due to changes in the social structures of Europe, the content of education became more fluid. Cannell (2006) explained that in the early medieval universities

doctrines and dogmas had been precise and fixed, rigidly formulated and strongly tied to the tradition of the church. As social and political conditions allowed more time for the exercise and pursuit of knowledge ... “scientific” inquiry into theology was espoused. The repetition of earlier commentaries was replaced by what was considered fresh thinking and dialectical technique (p. 133).

In these later iterations of medieval universities, then, we see the seeds of modern universities and their concerns with academic freedom and the pursuit of knowledge.

There remained, however, a connection to a holistic education that was formative for students—intellectually, practically, and spiritually.

Renaissance² and Reformation Formal Theological Education

The ascendance of the nation-state and the loosening of the ties between church and state that began with the dawn of the Renaissance (beginning roughly in the 14th century) led directly to many of the innovations that today are staples of academic education, including (especially) the centrality of academic freedom (Cannell, 2006; cf. Burke, 2000). In many ways, as Burke (2000) has argued, the Renaissance was a revival/retrieval of the classical tradition. It was a movement that self-consciously distanced itself from the focus on rational objectivity, logic, and speculative intellectualism found in the scholastic universities of the late middle ages (Cannell, 2006).

More importantly, much of the development of thought in the period of the early Renaissance took place outside the walls of the academy, and beyond the boundaries of what was considered knowledge (Burke, 2000). This can be seen clearly in the fact that the period is known at least as well for its aesthetic works as its intellectual products. Polymaths such as Leonardo Da Vinci produced timeless works of art as well as scientific and mathematical treatises that provide foundations for modern scientific developments. These developments took place outside of the universities, largely within loosely formed

² I am engaged in generalization here. A thorough discussion of the period known as the “Renaissance” would force the use of the plural. While it is largely a European-based phenomenon of the 14th–17th centuries, there were in fact several localized movements associated with what is now often pictured as a unified movement. It was in fact a diverse collection of personalities and ideas, and a full development of the period is beyond the scope of this paper. Cf. Burke, 2000, for a full exploration. Of course, the same point should be made for the Reformation(s) of the 16th and 17th centuries.

“academies,” or collections of people—both scholars and laypeople—for discussion groups which focused on education in all of its formative aspects. In many ways this was a reclamation of the spiritually-formative education of the classical world, and though the church had no formal control over these institutions (Grendler, 1989), it would be a mistake of presentism to suggest that the education of the Renaissance was “scientific” and divorced from spiritual (and in most cases Christian) formation (cf. Burke, 2000).

Several universities began during the period of the late 15th century, and the college system was born during this time period (cf. Cannell, 2006; Cambridge is the premier example of this period). While originally humanistic institutions full of promise of reform, a politically cautious environment would develop in these universities—due largely to political developments in Europe—and education once again largely declined into a conservative institution concerned with the transmission of “received” knowledge (Cannell, 2006; Burke, 2000). In fact, by the eighteenth century, University education came to be a system deemed useless by the majority of the population, and the faculties of the universities concerned themselves largely with logic chopping issues that advanced no new knowledge and mired the universities in place. Cannell (2006) expressed that “the King of Prussia was so disgusted with the universities that he appointed his court jester as president of one of them” (p. 138). The time was ripe for the reform of education, and the coming changes would be revolutionary and provide the defining characteristics of universities to this day. Some of these reforms, as we will see, certainly advanced knowledge and the human condition. However, with its marriage to modernist ideas, the university would ultimately be a source of fragmentation of the actual lives of students and the rejection of knowledge beyond the realm of Kantian rationalism (in Europe) and

Lockean empiricism (in England and North America). This would have serious impact on practices of spiritual formation in both the universities and seminaries of the modern world.

Modern (and Postmodern) Formal Theological Education Affecting Spiritual Formation

The modern university was born in the midst of the “intellectual wasteland” of Prussia in the late Renaissance (described above), largely under the inspiration of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Friedrich Wilhelm Humboldt. Cannell (2006) explained that Humboldt was particularly instrumental to this development, with “his conviction that the university exists to enlighten and humanize the state” (p. 138). Humboldt believed that intellectual development would inevitably lead to the development of character, and he populated the new university in Berlin with the preeminent intellectuals of his day in order to achieve this goal.

Again it would be simplistic (and a mistake) to suggest that the Berlin model—which would be exported, with modifications, throughout the world and have a major impact in North America—was openly opposed to a Christian worldview or to spiritual formation (understood as character formation). Indeed, the opposite was in fact true—the developers of the university in Berlin as well as those who brought about the university in North America expressly embraced Christian “truth” and saw their projects as in keeping with the spirit of Christian teaching (Marsden, 1996). Additionally, several other factors were involved in the formation of the North American university, including pietism and the burgeoning progressivism of a nation founded on Enlightenment principles (Cannell,

2006; Marsden, 1996).³ Nonetheless, the full-embrace of the enlightenment project and modernist philosophy would inevitably lead to emphasis upon the primacy of intellectual formation as the goal of education, ultimately with the goal of emancipating humanity from tradition and superstition through the application of modern “science” (cf. Cannell, 2006). Several developments in university education in the modern period would prove extremely important in understanding the loss of spiritual formation in the university (the first training ground of Protestant clergy) and later the seminary and divinity schools which were established to prepare clergy for ministry.

The fracturing of knowledge. Schleiermacher, in his work with the University in Berlin, was forced to justify the study of theology in the academy. To do so, he envisioned theology as a scientific study, and in his formulation of theology as a threefold pattern of study of philosophical theology, historical theology (including the study of Scripture), and practical theology (Cannell, 2006). This would later be modified slightly by Abraham Kuyper into the fourfold division that continues to be in use today: Biblical studies, historical theology (church history), systematic theology (doctrine), and practical theology—Kuyper’s term was “homiletics” (Cannell, 2006, p. 201).

Like the university’s other fields of study, theological studies became specialized within these fourfold divisions, with little overlap between the disciplines. Practical theology took on the characteristics of the applied sciences in North America and generally concerned itself with the preparation of ministers for their *functional* role as clergy, rather than continuing the medieval (and classical) practice of integrating

³ Again I am acutely aware of the inadequacy of this extremely generalized discussion. A thorough tracing of the history of university education in North America is far beyond the bounds of this document, and has been the subject of several books. For a thorough presentation, see Marsden (1996).

theology into the project of forming ministers' spiritual lives into the image of Christ (Cannell, 2010; cf. Farley 2001).

The division of theology into distinct disciplines ultimately had the effect of creating silos, as in so many other areas of academic study. The job of synthesizing and integrating the various fields of study *should* have been most naturally taken on by the practical theologians, but due to shifts in professionalization (see below) practical theology itself became largely concerned with the technical functions of the clerical office—administration, liturgical preparation, homiletics, etc.—rather than with the synthetic task of examining ways in which theology speaks a word to the contemporary world. Cannell (2010) has expressed that “As the disciplines of theology were consolidated, theological specialists trained in the academy tended to be less equipped to relate theology to pressing issues in congregations and society” (p. 232). The balkanization of theological studies in Protestant institutions, along with the relegation of practical theology to a lower status, had the unintended consequence of making theology irrelevant both to the church and the world around it.⁴

Professionalization and seminary education. Schleiermacher's shift of theological study to a science, especially with the resulting development of “practical theology,” would ultimately be caught up with other forces in late modern North America, one of the most important of which is the ever-expanding, self-defined “need” for professionalization (cf. McKnight, 1995). The professionalization of the clergy and of

⁴ In many ways this same dynamic can be seen throughout universities in North America: “practical” (read “interdisciplinary”) fields that are vital for interpreting, critiquing, rejecting, and applying various “knowledge” from more specialized disciplines are in almost every case viewed as second-class, less “scholarly” endeavors than are their more specialized siblings.

the seminary MDiv degree would have many consequences, one of which (discussed above) would be the perceived need for the degree to function as *preparation* for ministry, rather than something into which one is engaged during the practice of ministry. Cannell (2010) has argued that, due to the fact that

the nature of professional education is uniquely different from what is typical of the conventional theological curriculum, the church has not been well served in the effort to develop or improve leader capacity through this simple addition of courses and programs. Professional education presumes that intentionally planned and ongoing development of professional capacity extends over several years—it doesn't end once a degree is in hand (p. 233-4).

Cannell then argues that, for seminaries, it is time to rethink the interaction of ministerial/pastoral spiritual formation and the theological curriculum. The theological curriculum of the seminary should do much more than simply prepare graduates for their functional roles. Rather, the curriculum should find spiritual formation as its unifying core, and recognize spiritual formation—the formation of the spirit, through the Holy Spirit, into the image of Christ—as a lifelong process which only begins in seminary but is carried into the congregational contexts of its graduates. Several reformers have begun to recognize the need for the curriculum of the seminary to adjust to changing realities of the church and the world. I will now examine some of the most important of these figures.

(Post)modern reform efforts in theological education. Several important figures have emerged in the discussion of the future of theological education in the last twenty years. Central among these for this study is Robert Banks (1999), who imagined a

reinvigorated seminary moving beyond the restrictive walls of the university model and reclaiming a more ancient way of spiritual formation and ministerial preparation in seminary education. Banks' work did not begin this discussion in theological academia, but his remains seminal for reflections on the failures of seminaries and ways in which they might embrace an old (and new) model in order to fulfill their mission.

Banks (1999) argues for a more missional model of seminary education that is more interested in ministerial formation than academic attainment. He argues for Jesus as the quintessential educator and mentor for ministerial formation and then examines the life into which Jesus invited his disciples. "Those who did follow Jesus were able to share in the insecurity and danger he experienced as he moved around and lived counter-culturally" (Banks, 1999, p. 99-100). Jesus' education involved an invitation into the life of discipleship and a marriage of the theoretical and practical.

Spirituality for the Church and the Seminary: Reclaiming an Ancient Model in Dialogue with Contemporary Voices

In the current environment, then, it is possible for Christians to reclaim an ancient model of both spirituality and spiritual formation. Here I will examine the earliest understanding of the formation (and transformation) of the human spirit into the image of Christ—a formation that has at its base something similar to Paulo Freire's (1998) understanding of *praxis*, that is, the intersection of knowledge, lived experience, faith, and ethical living. I will begin with a discussion of what traits and characteristics are at the heart of the church's understanding of spiritual formation, specifically the Christian's calling to live out the gospel of Jesus' actions of love for neighbor. I will then bring these into dialogue with the earlier discussion of spiritual formation practices in the early church, and ultimately with select readings from Augustine's *Confessions*, identifying

pedagogies, experiences, and practices present at the moments of transformation. Finally I will compare and contrast with current seminary practices and suggest ways these might be informed by the ancient church.

Beginning especially with its founder, Christianity has been interested in changing lives (Spear, 2005). In late modernity, Christianity became identified with the status quo, in many ways, and lost its prophetic witness (Freire, 1985). Such was not always the case, though, as the church was, for the first three and a half centuries of its existence, the epitome of the “other” in Roman society. In this environment, Christians developed some of what would be staples of later-developed transformative theories of learning (Freire, 1984a, 1984b). As the church now attempts to reclaim its prophetic role in speaking against the injustice of the status quo, developing awareness of and action against current systems of oppression becomes vital.

Practice (or praxis, used interchangeably in the theological literature) is becoming central to theological education. Malcolm (1999) argues that this is at least in part a response to the “formalism” of previous generations of theologians. The need for the inclusion of practice in the curriculum of seminaries is argued, according to Malcolm (1999), from two perspectives. Postliberals argue that practices shape the identity of Christians and assist them in understanding the truth-claims of Christianity (p. 78). On the other hand, liberation theologians argue that practices offer opportunity for integrating action and reflection, which is necessary for the development of critical awareness (Malcolm, 1999; cf. Gutiérrez, 1988). This critical awareness is vital for Christians evaluating the culture for systematic oppression.

Seminaries have responded slowly to this need, but research suggests that some methods of pursuing critical awareness in action (spiritual formation) are quite effective (Saines, 2009; Quezada, 2011; Jones & Hammersley 2009, etc). Programs that have begun pursuing a curriculum which includes a component focused on practice have seen a marked improvement in student critical awareness and also in advocacy. Jones & Hammersley (2009) serve as an illustration of the effectiveness of engaged scholarship. In 2007, the authors led willing students in a protest at a nuclear submarine base in Great Britain. This protest was performed in conjunction with prior theological teaching and post-protest reflection and debriefing. Jones & Hammersley (2009) found through their research that the “prophetic” (p. 178) action and reflection was a transformative moment for students involved in the protest as well as for their classmates who did not participate. It led to critical discussion and the development of dialogue within their community of students.

Likewise, Quezada (2011) found, in a study of student-teachers teaching abroad, that the experience of differing cultures was extremely helpful to the development of critical consciousness, especially when performed in a context of reflection (journaling) and community with other teachers. Quezada’s (2011) study provides a model into the development of critical pedagogical practice in an increasingly “global” world. Students were asked to maintain a journal of reflection on “shared Christian praxis” (p. 423) through five activities. Each of these activities explored an aspect of praxis. For the purposes of this study, the third reflection is most intriguing. Students were asked to reflect on their experience in their learning community, as well as among the communities in which they were practicing. As praxis is the embodiment of theory (cf.

Freire, 1998), it is vital to understand how student interaction with communities is developed within pedagogical practice. Quezada's study revealed that students developed a much more open view of other cultures through the combination of theory, practice, and reflection.

Likewise, Norton (2012) discovered the power of experiencing cross-cultural encounters, in the context of community, could be transformative on human behavior. Students in Norton's study of the effect of short-term missions on prayer behaviors revealed that "group prayers" (p. 335), or practicing the spiritual discipline of prayer in community with "others," was significantly increased when students experienced people from other cultures in person.

A common theme throughout the literature is the necessity of community in developing critical consciousness and practice (Saines, 2009); that is, living and learning in a community is vital to spiritual formation. In part this is at the heart of critical pedagogy: the facilitator is both teacher and learner, and the student both learner and teacher. Knowledge is created in the discourse between the two (and the many). Additionally, though, students who experience, in body, the presence of the "other" are forced into Mezirow's (1991) "disorienting dilemma." This inevitably leads to critical consciousness, and ultimately to a change of praxis.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In any research, it is of utmost importance that the method fit the question—that the design of the study captures data appropriate to the subject (Merriam, 2009; van Manen, 1990). In chapter two I argued that spiritual formation is primarily a phenomenological event—that is, an experience of the sacred, culminating in the transformation of the thought, practice, and social life of the person involved. Insofar as this is the case, qualitative research methodology offers the greatest opportunity to explore with participants the experience and meanings of this event and offer thick, detailed description of the participants' experience of spiritual formation (Merriam, 2009).

Qualitative methods of research, including those used in this study, gather rich data that offers deep insight into events and consequences, and particularly into the participants meaning-making of these events (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this way, qualitative methods contrast sharply with the positivist impulses of quantitative study for prediction and control; rather, qualitative study allows for an understanding of context, meaning, and experience, recognizing factors which might contribute to transferability, but which avoid the dangerous homogenizing of generalizability found in the positivist foundations of scientific quantitative study (Merriam, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In order to understand the experience of spiritual formation, as well as of seminary and its

effects on spiritual formation of the participants of this study, the thick, descriptive data provided by qualitative research is absolutely necessary.

Qualitative Research and Scientific Investigation

As an academic and societal pursuit, scientific research has been both a blessing and a curse. One cannot deny that advances in human technology, medicine, mobility, and a myriad of other fields attributable directly to scientific research have added greatly to human quality of life. Often, however, the costs of research have been minimized or even denied in the positivist, modernist West, which virtually equated scientific progress with human flourishing (Middleton & Walsh, 1995).

The development of early-modern *Wissenschaft* (scientific method with a positivist epistemological commitment) in the universities of Germany (and later exported around the world) was largely viewed as a triumph of human reason over nature and an escape from the shackles of tradition and superstition (Middleton & Walsh, 1995; Grenz, 1996). The scientific methods and epistemology of the modern universities in the West represent the mature expression of Descartes' answer to the epistemological crisis of the so-called Enlightenment (Gregory, 2012). Descartes' famous dictum, *Cogito, Ergo Sum*, which would become the central expression of Enlightenment epistemology, depicted the *rational* self as the sole basis (and arbiter) of knowledge (Willard, 1995).

This epistemological shift away from experiential, spiritual, and revealed knowledge would have enormous impact on research in every field of study as so-called subjective ways of knowing were relegated to non-knowledge (Christians, 2011; Gregory, 2012). In this environment, scientific research was understood to be value-free, and disconnected from ideology, perspectivism, and faith (Middleton & Walsh, 1995;

Gregory, 2012). These things, it was believed, were deeply connected to individuals and were thus subject to bias and varying meanings, whereas reason—through scientific method—was capable of providing *universal* understanding of *fact* versus values (Christians, 2011; Gregory, 2011). With such an understanding of knowledge and reality, and with a commitment to the idea of value-free scientific investigations and conclusions, researchers ultimately settled into a type of utilitarian ethic, committed to enhancing the greatest good to the greatest number of persons (Christians, 2011).

The social sciences, in a bid to be taken as seriously as their natural science cousins, also adopted the scientific method, resulting in a reductionism which minimized alternative modalities of knowing (especially those of indigenous, non-Western populations) of subjects (Ramachandra, 2008). In a relatively short period of time, the rationalist, positivist epistemology of the Enlightenment's mature expression in Modernity would become the foundation myth (meta-narrative) of Western society. As Ramachandra (2008) argues, "science" and "scientific" have become virtually identified with "rational" in the popular mind, and "the methods peculiar to the natural sciences (observation, theory formation, laboratory experimentation and so on) are praised as being scientific and the only intellectually respectable methods to deal with any subject matter.... All other knowledge depends, more or less, on prejudice, emotion, superstition, myth, or whatever, and as such is inferior in trustworthiness to scientific knowledge (p. 171)."

This hegemonic conception of knowledge combined with a utilitarian ethic had disastrous results, both for the natural sciences and (perhaps especially) for the social sciences (Christians, 2011). Christians (2011) explains that most social scientists have

Weber's essays between 1904 and 1917 in mind when suggesting that morality is beyond the scope of their research. Weber suggested that, while research is value-laden insofar as what is researched—and what questions are asked—assigns value to the topic, scientific method makes moral conclusions—oughts—undesirable and even counter-productive (Christians, 2011). This separation of morality from the scope of scientific led to some of the most serious abuses in history—from the syphilis research at Tuskegee to the horrendous experiments by Nazi physicians to the development and deployment of atomic weapons (Christians, 2011; Middleton & Walsh, 1995). For, as many postmodern writers have decisively shown, objectivity in research findings is myth which ultimately serves the interests of Western hegemony (Foucault, 1994; Middleton & Walsh, 1995; Grenz, 1996; Smith, 2006). As Lincoln & Guba (1985) demonstrate conclusively, all findings are value-laden, and the denial of such values led to a privileging of Western rationalism and the development of the belief in the beneficence of scientific progress. This powerful myth carried tragic consequences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Middleton & Walsh, 1995; Bauckham & Hart, 1999; Christians, 2011; Smith, 2006).

In the United States, the 1960s served as a crucial turning point in research.⁵ Certainly it was not the death knell of the myth of scientific objectivity and progress, but the massive cultural shifts and rising distrust of the status quo (through the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War protests, and the sexual revolution among many other

⁵ The discrediting and rising distrust of scientific hegemony which took place in the 1960s in the U.S. was preceded by that experienced in Europe following the First World War. Ultimately, the terror of the Second World War largely eradicated positivism in Europe—the science which had promised progress toward utopia developed the machine gun and the atomic bomb (see Bauckham & Hart, 1999; Grenz, 1996). For a discussion of the effect of this disillusionment on theology, and especially theological liberalism, see the fascinating correspondence between Karl Barth and his teacher Adolf von Harnack recorded in Howard, 2009.

things) brought to light some of the terrifying abuses and overreaches of the science of modernity (Middleton & Walsh, 1995; Bauckham & Hart, 1999). These developments led to a deep suspicion of the claims of science, especially insofar as those claims served as supports for injustice and oppression (Grenz, 1996; Bauckham & Hart, 1999; Middleton & Walsh, 1995).

In the midst of this environment, qualitative research began to rise in prominence (though it had in fact been in practice at least as early as the 1920s, in the Chicago School, cf. Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Qualitative research, building on the alternative epistemology developed by Edmund Husserl and his students (notably Martin Heidegger) known as phenomenology (Willard, 1995; van Manen, 1990), rejected the de-contextualization of research found in positivist scientific research. Instead, qualitative research attempts to enter fully into the experience of the participant(s) and begin by deeply describing that experience in an attempt to analyze participants' meaning making. Rather than generalizability, qualitative research speaks of *transferability*, arguing that any attempt to universalize experience involves—necessarily—a reductionist stance that minimizes and homogenizes individual experience and knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The researcher's work is to describe as deeply and richly as possible the experience of the subject and thereby allow readers to self-identify with the participant's lived experience in circumstances which may be similar, but never the same (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; van Manen, 1990). Such investigation, then, does not strive for predictability and control, as in positivist science.

Through a collection of empirical resources—case studies, interviews, artifacts, and the like—qualitative research attempts to describe the life-world and experiences of

participants. Then, using a variety of interpretive strategies, qualitative researchers attempt to make sense of this experience. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) liken the qualitative researcher to a *bricoleur*, a maker of quilts, who pieces together different interpretive techniques to produce a picture of the whole that shifts in meanings as different representations and interpretations are employed (p. 4). Another possibility for understanding the role of the qualitative researcher is that of the Jazz musician, creating a piece of music as she or he plays, employing one technique and another to adjust the meaning of the piece, transforming it at junctures to see the experience through different lenses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

In maintaining and exploring the *sitz im leben* of participants, qualitative research allows for the giving of voice to often-marginalized populations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It embraces a more holistic understanding of human experience and thereby rejects the hegemony of Cartesian categories of knowledge and truth, expanding its scope of study beyond the reductionist methodologies often used in the natural sciences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In response to this, the critique often raised against qualitative research is the suggestion that, lacking objectivity, it cannot elucidate objective truth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln & Guba (1985), among others, argue that the idea of objectivity is itself a denial of truth, and that any account of “truth” must take into account and even value the subjective experiences, interpretations, and meaning-making of participants (Merriam, 2009). Further, the process of qualitative research involves constant interaction with the participants in a co-constructive process, so that the participants are always aware of the researcher’s data and suggested findings, and thus able to inform any conclusions drawn (Merriam, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Finally, qualitative research is essentially activist research—that is, qualitative inquiry is often seen as a tool of empowerment, giving voice and agency to the participants being studied (Merriam, 2009; Christians, 2011; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Metz, 2000). In this sense then, qualitative inquiry both avoids the gnostic, disembodied tendencies of positivist science, as well as opens the possibility for the researcher’s engagement in the fundamentally Christian task of neighbor-love by giving voice to the voiceless and marginalized.

Specific Form of Qualitative Research for this Study: Phenomenology, Spiritual Autobiography, and Participant as Observer

Phenomenology as method of investigation.

All qualitative research is, insofar as its focus is the participant’s experience, phenomenological (Merriam, 2009). However, as Merriam (2009) explains, phenomenological research uses particular tools of study which sets it apart from other forms of qualitative research. Of these tools, for Husserlian phenomenologists, *eidetic* reduction—the attempt to reduce a phenomenon to its essence—in conjunction with the phenomenological interview is key (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Phenomenology (and indeed qualitative inquiry), then, finds its groundings in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) and his thesis that first-order knowledge is experiential, and only secondarily analytical (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; van Manen, 1990). Though a scientist himself, Husserl was

critical of science’s privileged knowledge claims, reminding us that the *lifeworld* (the taken-for-granted, everyday life that we lead) provides the experiential grounding for what we might call the objective or scientific world.... Husserl saw science as a second-order knowledge system, which depends ultimately upon first

order personal experience. For Husserl, an extensive and rigorous phenomenological account of the world as it is experienced would be an essential precursor to any further scientific account (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 15).

Thus phenomenological inquiry begins with a description of the experience of the participant(s), examining it from various angles and perspectives, seeking the greatest amount of detailed description (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Key to this study is the commitment that a phenomenological account of knowledge gives priority to knowledge-of rather than knowledge-about. Phenomenological methodologies—as is the case with most qualitative methodologies—privileges the experience of the participants and attempts to enter *sympathetically* into that experience through a thorough description of the participants’ experiences by “bracketing out” preconceptions and rational constructs about these events (Merriam, 2009; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). To speak of “knowledge of” rather than “knowledge about” is to suggest that the participant’s interaction with the world is primarily (and of first-order) relational and only later rational and reflexive. The phenomenological investigation employed in this study thus attempts to describe the experience of spiritual formation among the participants of this study and to then attend to and reflect on its details rather than categorize and explain them.

Having laid out this basic definition of phenomenology and its general methodology, it is important at this point to discuss various developments within the philosophical/theoretical movement of phenomenology. While Husserl’s ultimate project aimed at exploring the *essence* of experience through eidetic reduction, subsequent

adherents to phenomenology abandoned this project for the more minimalistic goal of explicating an analyzing individual experience (van Manen, 1990; Merriam, 2009; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Husserl's student, Martin Heidegger, argued that Husserl's commitment to discovery of the essence of an experience was ultimately fruitless and even counter to the purpose of phenomenology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Heidegger argued that all knowledge is interpretive and therefore "worldly," that is, while human interpretation does not bring the world into existence, it provides meaning for the world (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Insofar as human knowledge necessarily involves interaction with the world and from within various worlds (social, political, etc.), it is a knowledge grounded in *this* life, in *this* world, and in *this* person (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The human being—the *Dasein* in Heidegger's term—is essentially "thrown into" a pre-existing world and must live interpretively within that world (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Thus knowledge, insofar as it exists, is always interpretive and unique—that is, experience and interpretation may not be transferred from one to another, there is no "essence" to find, and the distinction between subject and object which Husserl drew is therefore rejected (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Heidegger, 2008). Knowledge is, in this case, always and only contextual. Following Heideggerian development, much phenomenological research has abandoned eidetic reduction and Husserl's attempt to discover the essence of an experience.

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) argue that, ultimately, phenomenological inquiry is the product of the philosophical work of several people, and all contribute to the methodology in some way. In that phenomenological research regularly analyzes third person experience, it is always interpretive (van Manen, 1995; Smith, Flowers, &

Larkin, 2009). However, Husserl's conviction of the *essence* of experience—the universal “is-ness” and qualities of, say, the product of spiritually (trans)formative pedagogy—holds true.

Phenomenology, then, provides a clean philosophical break with Cartesian and Lockean concepts of knowledge in three essential ways: 1) consciousness is essentially conscious-of; 2) Things in the world manifest/disclose what they are through their appearances (and human interaction with them); and 3) the self is always already in the world and co-intends itself in acts of consciousness as the dative of manifestation—that is, as that to which the object is disclosed (Willard, 1995; Sokolowski, 1999).

Phenomenological research, with its focus on the experience of an event as knowledge, can offer a way forward beyond positivism while maintaining a realist epistemology (Willard, 1995). As van Manen (1990) explains, phenomenological research asks the question “What is this phenomenon in its whatness” (p. 33)? As such, it engages in the study of the pre-reflective consciousness of the experience of lived-life (van Manen, 1990). Again, van Manen (1990) suggests,

[Phenomenology] differs from almost every other science in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it. So phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world (p. 9).

This is important in that it offers a challenge to the Cartesian and Lockean views of knowledge as the product of the rational self (Willard, 1995). Spiritually formative

events, insofar as they are life-events and in whatever form they manifest—cognitive, emotive, practical, etc.—are therefore, in this study, considered important in themselves, and phenomenological research is the process of being attentive to the events themselves (Willard, 1995, 2009).

Spiritual autobiography as knowledge creation.

Spiritual autobiography serves as something similar to the autoethnography, examining formative events—cognitive, practical, and social—as well as cultural backgrounds of participants and presenting them in written descriptions (Tierney, 2000). Perhaps the first spiritual autobiography, and that which serves as the prototype for this study, is the classic work of Augustine's *Confessions*. In this work, Augustine explores the formative events in his life, in the form of an extended prayer or conversation with God. Certainly Augustine hoped to accomplish much more than to provide an autobiography—the work is an extended theological reflection on love and its transformative power. However, the *Confessions* provide insight, in various places, to the development of spiritual formation in one of the great Christians of the past.

The spiritual autobiography is similar to *testimonio* in that it is driven not by the questions of the researcher, but rather by the participant (Beverley, 2008). It differs, though, in that its purpose is not empowerment—the giving of voice to one who would not otherwise be heard (Beverley, 2008)—but transformation. It opens up possibilities for exploration and meaning making for both researcher and participant (van Manen, 1990). In addition, the spiritual autobiography has similarities with ethnographic research, in that it involves the exploration of one's life history, societal place, and culture (Merriam, 2009). Autoethnographic research is also appropriate for this study, insofar as Roman

Catholic seminaries maintain a *culture* of spiritual formation, while Protestant seminaries have focused their efforts on rational formation (along modernist lines) and professionalization/specialization (Farley, 1994; Kelsey, 1993). The spiritual autobiographies may well shed light on the ways in which the culture of Protestantism in general, and North American Protestantism more specifically, affect spiritual formation in Protestant seminaries.

It is important to note, though, as van Manen (1990) has cautioned, that a phenomenological study of (auto)biography has as its intended purpose the uncovering of an existential meaning, rather than an individual or private meaning (p. 72). As such, the spiritual autobiographies written for this study are intended to be, primarily, evocative: they should capture, in thick description, the *experience* of spiritually formative moments of participants—so that, as van Manen (1990) explains, “[the spiritual autobiographies] may be examined as an account of the possible experience of other [people]” (p. 73). In addition, the composition of a personal narrative allows for a deeper exploration of spiritually formative moments—it resists pre-categorizations and allows participants to fully explore their own experiences.

A phenomenological analysis of these spiritual autobiographies is especially appropriate for this study, in that the accounts provide rich data which provide existential insight into the process and movements of spiritual formation—often recursive and always interactive. With its commitment to description, rather than explanation, phenomenological methodology avoids reductionist, easy answers to the problem of spiritual formation in seminaries. It invites readers to enter into the experience of spiritual formation of the participants and self-identify with those experiences. It engages in an

exploration of themes within the spiritual autobiographies which possibly illumine a universal *essence* of spiritual formation that others might find applicable (van Manen, 1990).

Participant as observer.

Insofar as Christian spiritual formation is both communal and individual participatory inquiry, or participant as observer, is appropriate. Merriam (2009) points out that participant observation falls basically along a continuum, from complete participation (and concealing of identity) to the participant as observer (in which research interests are secondary to participation) to observer as participant (participation is secondary to research interests) to complete observer (the researcher does not participate in the project beyond her or his research interests) (p. 124–5). Another way has emerged, though, in which the researcher is a “collaborative partner” with participants, and in which the researcher’s role is clearly established from the outset (Merriam, 2009, p. 125). In this setting, the research becomes, basically, collaborative inquiry, in which the researcher and participants engage in meaning-making and knowledge-creation as co-equals. This study will proceed in this manner, as each participant (including the observer) has experience and a valuable interpretive (hermeneutical) perspective for understanding the organic process of spiritual formation.

Advocates of the objectivity of scientific investigation, of course, value the dispassionate researcher. Qualitative research, however, embraces the experience and subjectivity of the researcher and the participants, valuing subjective experience as a vital part of knowing, and rejecting the very possibility of objectivity.

There are, however, difficulties for this model of research, enumerated especially by Merriam (2009). These include the possibility that the observer might become overwhelmed in the process of participation and miss valuable insights. Additionally, there is some question as to what extent the observer's overall impact on the participants. The development of trust and the constant use of member checks is a must in order to ensure full participation (Merriam, 2009). As Merriam (2009) explains, "The question, then, is not whether the process of observing affects what is observed but how the researcher can identify those effects and account for them in interpreting the data" (p. 127). In order to accomplish this, the observer must engage him or herself *as* observer (Patton, 2002). Because of the participative nature of this research project, the participants will also be heavily involved in the exploration of the spiritually formative events in their own and fellow-participants' experiences, thereby mitigating the possible effects of the presence of the participant-observer.

Positioning the researcher

It is important to situate the researcher with regard to epistemological commitments and qualitative research. As has already been noted, a central preconception of this study is the understanding that positivism—in its many expressions but especially in its modernist formulations—has both hampered research by placing arbitrary (and often self-serving) limits on what may be called knowledge *and* served as a tool of oppression, especially of expressions and forms of knowledge ruled as "subjective" by Anglo-European Enlightenment thinkers, including religious and spiritual experiences (Middleton & Walsh, 1995; van Manen, 1990; O'Malley, 2003; Willard, 2009). Qualitative research, with its commitment to thick description and presentation of

events-as-knowing, serves as a counterweight to the positivist demand that knowledge is always and only a quantifiable, rational product. For the purposes of this study, the developments in epistemology led by Edmund Husserl and expanded further by Heidegger and especially Willard provide a framework for understanding the creation of knowledge through lived experience (cf. Willard, 1995).

Specifically, regarding spiritual formation, Willard's (2009) theory of knowledge offers an alternative to naturalism and its commitment to empiricism. For Willard, there is, in fact, a *spiritual* knowledge, which can be explored and interacted with by attending to that knowledge. This knowledge is evidenced through the lives lived by those disciples who embraced it through the ages and transformed the world around them toward maximum human good (Willard, 2009, especially pp. 83-93). Willard's (1995, 2009, 2002) development of Husserl's theory of human knowing puts to rest the hegemonic claim of "objectivity" present in so much empirical research, showing that all research is value-laden, and knowledge itself is created and known within a context. This is vital to an investigation of the phenomenon of spiritual formation. The theoretical framework from which my research proceeds, then, might be designated "critical realism." I reject as fallacy the idea of objective observation and positivist scientific study. However, contra Postmodern objections to positivism, I affirm the existence of an "is," that is, I believe that an object of study transcends the researcher, and that the researcher may access to some extent the "is" of the object not primarily through the rational self, but through experience and critical reflection on experience (Mezirow, 1991; Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985).

Research Design

Given the goal of this study and the powerful tool that phenomenology offers to understanding human knowing, a phenomenological account of the participants' experience of spiritual formation was vital to gathering data. As such, this study employed the tools of phenomenological research, with thick description of transformative spiritual events by the participants both in written form and in co-constructive interviews and discussions. The design was recursive. Each form of data was continuously in dialog with the others, providing a hermeneutical circle for interpretation of the experiences of spiritual formation among the participants (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

The *Confessions* and spiritual autobiography.

This study began with a development of my own spiritual autobiography, using Augustine's *Confessions* as a model. The document itself served as something of a guided self-interview, which limited the possibility of poorly managed interviews that may have resulted in too little or too much information (van Manen, 1990). I then analyzed the document, using the procedure which van Manen (1990) called "thematic analysis" (p. 78). Van Manen (1990) warned that "too often theme analysis is understood as an unambiguous and fairly mechanical application of some frequency count or coding of selected terms in transcripts or texts, or some other break-down of the content of protocol or documentary material" (p. 78).

Theme analysis, instead, is more creative, even artistic. It is the search for phenomenological themes, which "may be understood as *structures of meaning*" (van Manen, 1990, emphasis original). Themes are constructs: they are an attempt by the researcher to find meaning within the "text" being researched (van Manen, 1990). Van

Manen (1990) suggested that, in phenomenological studies, developing themes from the narrative/interview is more art than science. A theme is a schema or *techné* applied to the text in order to assist the *researcher* in finding meaning within and giving structure to the structureless (van Manen, 1990). Further, a theme is not a “thing,” it is something of a metanarrative throughout the text, it is the “experience of focus, of meaning, of point,” often present in the narrative but unnoticed by the participant and brought to light by the researcher (van Manen, 1990, p. 87). As such, it is necessarily a simplification of the complexity of the text. It “describes an aspect of the structure of lived experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 87). For participants and researchers, “phenomenological themes are not objects or generalizations; metaphorically speaking they are more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes” (van Manen, 1990). Because of this, thematic analysis must always be aware that a theme is simply a stand-in for a much more existentially complex phenomenon; it only *points* to this phenomenon and provides focus for the researcher.

In order to uncover (and create) themes within the narrative, a blended method of open coding was used along with specific phenomenological data analysis techniques—including horizontal imaginative variation, in which the researcher attempts imaginatively to view the data from a multitude of angles and build a construct of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). As the researcher and participants engage in imaginative variation, the documents are coded as themes emerge from the different perspectives explored, and possibilities of meaning are imagined and examined for further investigation and illumination.

Presentations and discussions as participant observer

Following the development and analysis of my spiritual autobiography, I held an initial group interview in which I oriented the participants to the study, offered the prompt for the spiritual autobiography, and presented my own spiritual autobiography. I also used this gathering as something of a focus group designed to illuminate possible emergent themes of the experience of spiritual formation among the participants, and in a recursive process, I attended to my spiritual biography with these themes, revising the research questions as drawn to do so. Focus groups provide co-constructed knowledge and serve to further the phenomenological process of imaginative variation (van Manen, 1990; Merriam, 2009). Insofar as community plays a vital role in Christian spiritual formation, the group interviews offered a singularly important venue for gathering latent data.

Several group interviews followed, at which a participant presented her or his spiritual autobiography to the group. This was followed by discussion led by open-ended discussion prompts. Group dynamics allowed for deeper exploration of the experience (Merriam, 2009). In addition, as Christian spiritual formation is inherently communal, the groups themselves served as a pedagogical experience, elucidating and furthering spiritual formation (van Manen, 1990).

The group interviews took place as spiritually-formative events, with participants gathering for prayer, individual meditation and spiritual exercises, and finally the presentation and group discussions. This holistic methodology, which includes theory and practice, placed the interviews in the context of praxis and served the function of

phenomenological study, which van Manen (1990) called the “pedagogy of theme” (p. 89).

Participants

Five participants, including the researcher, participated in the study. These were selected using purposeful sampling, specifically typical sampling (Merriam, 2009).

Purposeful sampling is particularly appropriate for qualitative study, and this particular qualitative study, insofar as it focuses on participants who will have the most information to offer, and is not concerned with generalizability (and thus is at cross purposes with random sampling; Patton, 2002). As Patton (2002) explained, “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich* cases for study in depth.

Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry” (p. 230).

Seminary students vary greatly, but the sampling selection provided a range of participants reflective of the typical seminary student (Merriam, 2009). The participants selected for the study have both seminary and ministry experience. Additionally, they have interest in spiritual formation. In this way, the participants were somewhat self-selected.

Additionally, in order to assist in developing transferability, the participants were chosen from various stages of post-seminary life. They varied in gender, race, and denomination. It was important that a woman be included among the participants, insofar as women serving in formal ministry is relatively new (and still in its early stages) in my theological tradition. This cross section of seminary graduates interested in spiritual formation offered rich data for the study.

Collection of Data

Several tools were used for the collection of data. I maintained a journal throughout the process, reflecting on emerging themes as well as connecting developments with the literature. Additionally, the participants' spiritual autobiographies provided rich data for analysis. Further, each of the group interviews was recorded and transcribed. All of these provided triangulation of data, bolstering the findings of the analysis.

Researcher's Journal

My journal provided the most obvious initial point of entry for the data, insofar as it was the most easily interpreted and immediately available. In this sense, as Merriam (2009) pointed out, data analysis began the moment the journaling began. The journal contained reflections upon the my own progress in developing the spiritual autobiography, my impressions from initial interviews and follow up interviews, and closed with reflections on the group interview. The journal thus provided a beginning point for analysis. Analysis was then conducted in this journal throughout the course of the study.

Following Merriam (2009), the journal was analyzed in search of answers to the research questions using open coding. The emergent themes provided categories into which data from the journal was sorted as well as for the analysis of the remainder of the data collected.

Spiritual Autobiographies

As noted above, each participant developed a spiritual autobiography according to her or his own preferred genre. The spiritual autobiographies focused on formative moments and practices in the participants' lives as well as their experience of seminary.

Group Interviews

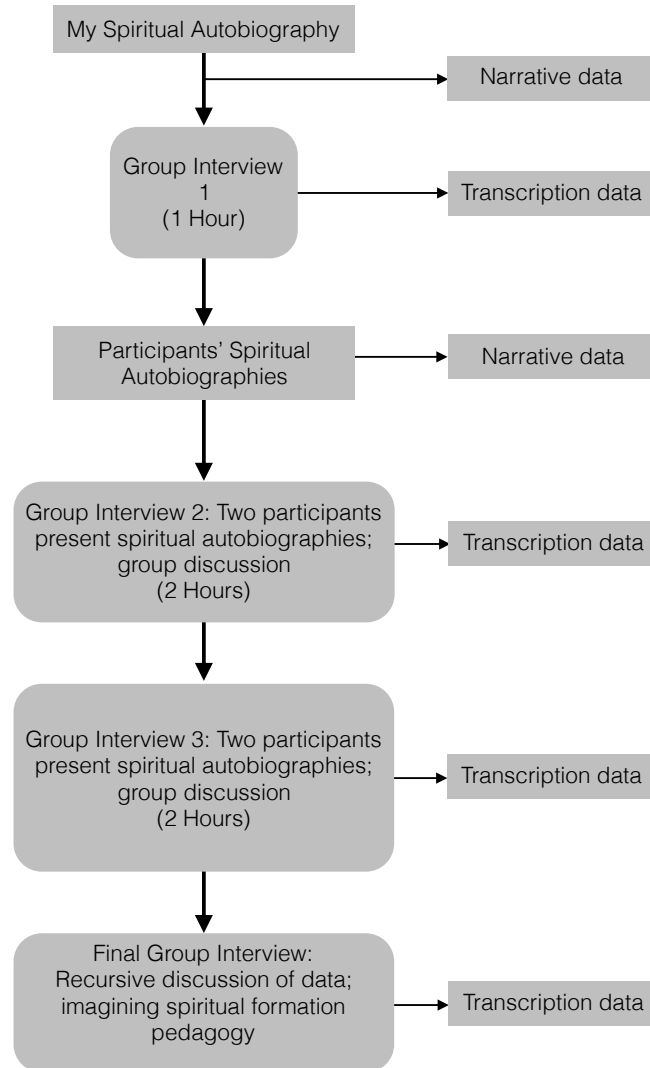
I met with the participants as a group for four interviews in which we explored our experiences in pre-seminary church life, in seminary, in ministry, and in our current environments. I introduced the participants to my spiritual autobiography in the first meeting, and I familiarized them with the genre of spiritual autobiography. Three additional gatherings took place in which each participant presented her or his autobiography for the group, followed by engagement in prayer and discussion reflecting on the *essence* of spiritual formation (Merriam, 2009).

The interviews were open and flexible, engaging the text of each participants' spiritual autobiography and exploring the most vivid and (what participants identify as) most important experiences of spiritual formation. Additionally, using semi-structured prompts, the interviews focused specifically on the role of seminary in the participants' spiritual formation, and explored ways in which (and to what extent) the experience of seminary—again, cognitively, habitually, socially—shaped their spiritual selves. Attention will be given to providing thick description of these experiences—locations, times, dates, important life-events, church calendar, secular calendar, spiritual disciplines and practices in which the participants engaged, and the like. Each of these factors, insofar as they deepened the experience of the participants, offered insight into the spiritually formative nature of the Christian life.

The final group interview served as a recursive phenomenological interview in which participants were invited to interact with the studies' findings and provide further clarification as needed. It also served to provide further data as participants engaged in meaning-making of the data and imagined strategies for effective pedagogy of spiritual formation.

The data collection process may be diagrammed as follows:

Data Collection Process



Data Analysis

Once the participants completed and presented their spiritual autobiographies, the participants as a group employed intuitive analysis of the text, using Merriam's (2009) open-coding methodology. As codes begin to emerge from the text, the group analyzed them for emergent clusters of themes—essences (van Manen, 1990). This allowed themes to emerge from the text rather than being forced upon it. The communal analysis of the data provided a multivalent understanding of the data—similar to what Merriam (2009) referred to as horizontal imaginative variation, in which data is observed from multiple life situations and angles and imaginatively built into a construct of the phenomenon. In addition, as Bazeley (2013) suggests, this initial foray into the data was an appropriate moment to “play” with the data, to experiment with it as a puzzle to be solved (pp. 106–110).

Each interview was reviewed several times in order to most accurately recapture the experience of the interview itself. This was done in conjunction with the use of my memos made throughout the interview process in an attempt to thickly describe evocative moments of the interview.

In addition, I appropriated from *Lectio Divina* the practice of slowly reading (and listening) through the text meditatively, pausing where the interviews paused and listening for unspoken meanings (cf. Robertson, 2011). I listened through recordings of the interviews as I trained for a half marathon, and I listened to them during my hour long commute to work. I prayed over them and *lived* in them, becoming familiar both with the interviews and the participants in the process which was itself spiritually formative.

Merriam's (2009) framework for analysis was used for the interviews. Transcripts of the interviews were read thoroughly, several times, and commented upon. Following Merriam (2009), open coding was used again on the interview transcripts. An additional list of codes and categories was developed for the interviews as a unit of analysis.

Once a list of codes was developed for each of the data collection resources, these lists were analyzed, compared, and merged into a master list (Merriam, 2009). This list then provided the categories for data sorting and thus findings.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Insofar as qualitative research examines lived human phenomena which are, in essence, unrepeatable, repeatability is not a valid mechanism for verifying the credibility of a qualitative study. Key to the validity of qualitative research is the idea of transferability (Merriam, 2009). It is important that the study provide enough detailed description—of participants, of the setting, of the questions being researched, of the findings—for readers to determine the extent to which the study is transferrable into their own contexts (cf. Merriam, 2009, p. 226–227).

As a participant and observer, it is relevant that I note my credentials for this study. I hold both undergraduate and graduate degrees in theological education as well as a graduate degree in library science. In addition, I am a professional librarian and faculty member at a seminary. These qualifications allow for specific insight into both theological issues as well as issues of categorization (key to qualitative data analysis; Bazeley, 2013).

Further, the study had triangulation in data collection. Several sources of data collection provided the ability for checking findings across these sources. In addition, a

detailed literature review has been performed to place the study within the broader context of discussion regarding spiritual formation in seminary education.

Member checks were performed throughout the course of research and analysis in order to ensure that each participant was informed of (and encouraged to react to) findings in the study. Following the initial round of open coding, the participants were informed of the categories found in the data and were asked for reaction. Finally, once the data had been coded and transformed into findings, participants engaged these findings and evaluated their accuracy.

Patton (2002) explained the importance of being open to rival or additional interpretations of the data. As such, the research was discussed regularly with other faculty members at the seminary. These discussions brought about awareness of possible rival interpretations which were (and continue to be) then weighed in the analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Engaging in spiritual formation and analyzing the amount of formation that has occurred carries some minimal risk. Students who are asked to reflect deeply upon life, spiritual habits, significant events, and their own behavior and reactions may be made uncomfortable and even experience deep anxiety. As the study took place with participants working within a church/seminary setting, licensed counselors were available for participants who needed this assistance.

Participants were asked to volunteer for the study, and it was made clear that there was no disincentive to avoid participation in the study. In order to participate, volunteers were asked to sign a consent form which made them fully aware of their rights as participants, including the right to cease participation at any time. Additionally, the

member checks performed offered opportunities for participants to deny the use of any piece of information drawn from any data collection source mentioned above.

Participants' names and any identifiers have been scrubbed from the data, and they have been given pseudonyms. Data was securely stored and has been accessible only to those involved directly in the research. Every effort has been made to ensure that each participant remains anonymous.

Finally, the conclusions/findings drawn from the data must be consistent with the data itself. The member checks described above have assisted in this, and the findings have been reviewed by colleagues in order to ensure rigorous analysis and responsible interpretation.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Theoretical Orientation

Christian spiritual formation is the process (life-long) of forming one's internal, unbodily personal power—that is, a power which exists within the body but is not reducible to it (Willard, 2008)—in such a way as may be manifested in Christ-like action. That is to say, the disciplines of Christian spiritual formation have as their goal the conformation of Christians, internally and externally, to the character of Christ as manifested in his or her outward behavior (Willard, 2008). As such, while certain aspects of Christian spiritual formation may be quantified, qualitative inquiry is most appropriate to exploring the deep structures and meaning-making processes involved in spiritual transformation (Denzin, 2014).

This study has employed spiritual autobiography—similar to autoethnography (cf. Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Denzin, 2014; Tierney, 2000)—as a medium for participants to explore and describe moments of spiritual transformation in their lives. Autoethnographic study, as well as the spiritual autobiography, examines participants' lived experience, exploring (often in narrative form) important, formative events as well as cultural and societal backgrounds (Ellis & Adams, 2014). Additionally, spiritual autobiography is similar to *testimonio* as described by Beverley (2008), insofar as it is driven by the interests, concerns, and narrative of the participants rather than the researcher's questions. Because seminaries are cultural entities—they house and maintain a culture unto themselves, as outlines above, with respect to knowledge and its production as well as a

concern with human formation (cf. Banks, 1999; Shaw, 2014)—autoethnographic research is particularly well-suited to this study (Merriam, 2009; Denzin, 2014).

Participants composed their spiritual autobiographies separately and then subsequently presented them to one another in a forum. The presentations and discussions of these autobiographies then became further opportunity for meaning-making and further epiphanies (as defined by Denzin, 2014)⁶ regarding formative moments, practices, and relationships in spiritual formation. The post-presentation dialogs served as recursive moments, in which deeper exploration of the moments of spiritual formation in participants' lives was possible.

In order to provide fruitful discussion, the dialogs themselves became moments of spiritual formation. Each presentation was surrounded by prayer and contemplative reading (both of Christian scripture and spiritual works). Insofar as participants are always (and especially in spiritual formation) *becoming*—in process—the format of spiritual autobiography *in conjunction with* the group explorations of these autobiographies is uniquely appropriate to explore participants' stories and critically reflect on the narratives as constructs (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985). Denzin (2014) has explained that stories themselves are open to interpretation and always incomplete (p. 5). Insofar as narrative is selective and (at least to an extent) fictive, the written narratives themselves served as important pieces of data for analysis and provided rich material for the participants to discuss and critically reflect upon (Denzin, 2014).

⁶ Denzin (2014) defines an epiphany as a “moment of revelation in a life” (p. 15) which leads to significant change in life-direction (p. 14). Insofar as these epiphanies emerged *during* the data collection and co-analysis with the group, they represent what Denzin refers to as “relived” epiphanies, or “those episodes whose meanings are given in the *reliving* of the experience” (p. 53).

Spiritual Formation and the De-Centered Self

The experience of religion—whether theistic or non-theistic—in human life has been intimately tied to moral transformation, according to Hick (2004). Hick (2004) has posited that

Each of these [the concept of the deity in theistic traditions, or the concept of the absolute in non-theistic traditions] is schematized in actual human experience to produce the experienced divine *personae* ... and metaphysical *impersonae* ... to which human beings orient themselves in worship or meditation. The function of religion in each case is to provide contexts for salvation/liberation, *which consists in various forms of the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness* (p. 14, emphasis mine).

This movement from self-centeredness toward a broader conception of human communal responsibility (whether Hick’s “reality-centeredness” is appropriate or not) seems to be a universal human understanding. Indeed, Hoffman (2000) has argued that the movement toward a de-centered self is vital to human survival and is a product of human evolution. Hoffman’s development of a model of human empathic development has become a keystone in modern discussions of moral development. Hoffman (2000) argued that human moral development moves in stages and consists of a widening circle of empathy in which humans become more aware of the suffering of others and move beyond egocentric concern to (ultimately) empathic action.

Thus there is a certain level of transferability between what this document envisions as Christian spiritual formation and other conceptions of human moral development. In terms of data analysis, this model provides a unit of measurement for the

participants. To the extent a person has become empathically enabled, decentering the self—whether that is selfishness or critical reflection on preconceptions and prejudices—toward the pursuit of caring for others, they are reflecting (in Christian terms) spiritual formation toward the human *telos* Jesus presents in the Sermon on the Mount: to love God with all one’s heart and to love one’s neighbor as oneself.

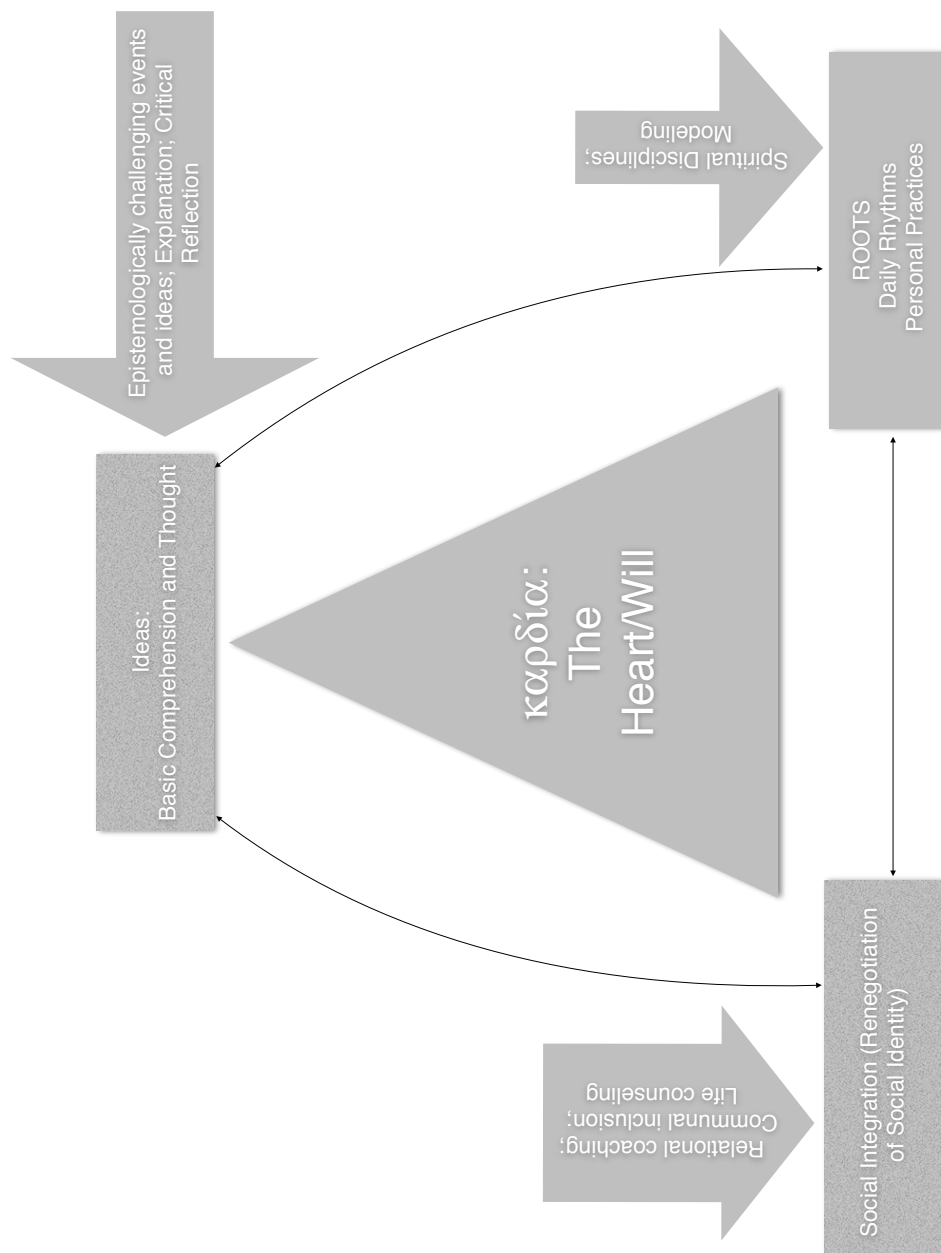
In analyzing the data collected, then, the participants have reflected on moments in which the self was in the process of becoming de-centered and outward focused. This is seen both in the transformation of thought and feeling as well as in a movement toward activism in hopes of change in the participants’ respective communities. These moments were then analyzed (as per the methodology described above) for emergent themes, around which coded data were clustered. Through the process of thematic analysis, I discovered that the experience of spiritual formation which had lasting effect on the lives of participants corresponded with a schematic of lasting personal change developed by Daniel Napier (N.d.), drawn from Jesus’ parable of the sower in Matthew 13. This schematic thus provided a natural cognitive device around which to organize themes which participants recognized as emerging from the spiritual autobiographies. I will begin by describing this schematic here and then proceed through the findings below.

Three Aspects of Lasting Personal Change

For purposes of this study, lasting personal change—here defined as spiritual formation toward the decentered self which takes root in the heart/will and remains a part of a person’s life—requires transformation in three main areas: 1) Ideas (in basic comprehension and thinking); 2) Roots (habits, daily rhythms, personal practices); and 3) Social integration (a renegotiation of identity within a social context). Insofar as a person

evidences transformation in each of these areas—through various means and experiences—she is likely to maintain the transformation and continue working toward the trajectory of transformation established; conversely, to the extent in which these areas are not influenced toward transformation, spiritual formation itself is transitory and short lived (Napier, N.d.; cf. Willard, 2002). This model of spiritual formation, then, might be diagramed as follows:

Three Aspects of Lasting Change



Transformation in each of these areas is facilitated in different ways.

Transformation of ideas can occur, often, through epistemologically challenging events and ideas, through differing interpretive (hermeneutical) frameworks, and through critical reflection on data and events. The confusion and cognitive dissonance which occurs when a learner interacts with an idea or experience which challenges what might be termed core-level knowledge (taken for granted, familiar *a priori*) has been termed a “disorienting dilemma” by Mezirow (1991, p. xvi), or more evocatively an *epistemological shudder* by Losinsky and Collinson (1999, as cited in Giugni, 2006). These events are chaotic moments and may facilitate what has been referred to as “Productive Aporia” by Charteris (2014, p. 106), that is, as moments which provide a different perspective on data and experiences and which therefore lead to a transformation in thought and thus a breaking apart and radical adjustment of what Berger and Luckmann (1966) refer to as the world taken for granted. This is a key moment to transformation toward the kind of knowledge of the gospel for which Freire (1984b) calls, and thus toward true spiritual formation.

Transformation in habits and practices is vital to lasting spiritual (trans)formation. Habits and practices both form and are formed by our desires, and therefore are central to human identity as desiring animals (Smith, 2009). Habits are usually transformed through the somewhat mechanical process of repetition: humans who desire a change of habits must focus for some time on changing their daily routines in order to incorporate some new habit. Smith (2009) also argues that liturgy provides a substructure to habits and practices, that the practices of liturgy—whether the liturgy of the church or the liturgy of the consumerist mall—inform our self-understanding and our vision of the “good life.” In

order to adjust habits and practices, then, it is necessary to start new ones. This is not new, of course, as Aristotle has argued that diligent practice of habits develop within a person a character toward *eudaemonia*, or “fulfillment” (Aristotle, 2009). Thus for a person to achieve lasting spiritual formation they must experience a transformation of habits and practices.

Finally, in order for a person to attain lasting spiritual formation, she or he must engage in a social integration of their new person. This is often a difficult task, insofar as human community is often held together through common commitments. A person who has radically spiritually changed—for example, a person who has recognized that the call of the gospel demands change in their attitudes toward an issue of social justice—will often find great resistance in their current social group. This will call for a re-negotiation of social identity both with their peer group as well as with groups outside of their peer group. Often this means a severing of ties with a previous group, which can have devastating consequences for the spiritually transformed person. Though this may be the most difficult area of change, it is also perhaps the most vital, as human community and support is so important for developing spiritually (cf. McKnight, 1995).

Description of Participants

The study was conducted in cooperation with four participants and the researcher as participant-as-observer. Each participant has experience in both ministry and seminary work and thus is able to offer insight into each environment as well as their interplay. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling in order to draw as much insight as possible into the research questions of the study (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Though the students have similar histories in regard to ministry and seminary, their experience of

these events is diverse, thus offering multivalent insight into transferability for researchers (Merriam, 2009). I will here present each of the participants' stories in order to offer the reader perspective on the breadth of their experience and the data gathered from their spiritual autobiographies and interviews. I will initially present the material and avoid analysis in order to allow the reader to engage them phenomenologically and simply experience the stories (cf. Van Manen, 1990). I begin with my full spiritual autobiography in order to invite readers into this story, followed by a thick description of each participant drawn from their spiritual autobiographies.

My Spiritual Journey. I was raised in the bosom of the church. Some of my very earliest memories are of lying in the pew with my head in my mother's lap or cradled against my father's chest, listening to the rumble as he sang. In those days there was something rapturous, even wondrous to me about the church's worship, or at least my family's place in it. It was here I heard my father, a quiet man, sing aloud. Here, too, I learned to sit quietly, almost in awe as a large group of people prayed and sang. I longingly watched the communion plate pass, desperate to be a participant. But I can remember how my exclusion made me believe it to be something *special*, different from everything else we did. From as far back as my first memories I can remember my mom telling me I was going to be a preacher. I'm not sure what she saw. I certainly didn't feel it. But what does a kid that age really know?

I was baptized at 9. I think I just wanted to be included in that communion ceremony. I'm not sure what else was driving it. I had a conversation with my dad before being baptized in which he quizzed me on my "understanding." It must have satisfied him, because he baptized me. In terms of who I was and who I would become, I cannot

point to any particularly transformative nature of the act. It was just a natural outflow of being in the church.

When I was 12 years old, the preacher at our congregation—Ambrose—grabbed my hand after church one morning and informed me that I was going to be in ministry. Ambrose was an older man (I honestly don't recall his age at the time) and an excellent preacher, and I greatly respected him. He encouraged me to bible study, and also encouraged me to speak in church. So, at 13 years old, I spoke on a Wednesday night at our congregation, in front of a few hundred (very patient) people. I can still remember the elder who got up after me asking if he could move the phone books I'd used to stand behind the pulpit. It was a gentle humor, and I've laughed about it since.

Looking back on those days, I recall that I was in a fairly deep depression (this was manifested in very melancholy poetry that I wrote in junior high). I hated school for all kinds of reasons. I did not like being around new people, and I did not make friends easily. I was a very withdrawn person (and I remain so, by nature), and at the time I was small and unable to really compete in sports or the like. I can only recall one friend from that time period, a younger boy who lived up the street. I don't remember any of the kids from my youth group at church, which was another place in which I did not feel welcomed. One morning, when I woke depressed (again) and was dreading facing the day, my mom told me "Todd, you can choose, at this moment, what kind of day this will be. It is up to *you* to determine whether you are going to embrace the day and really live, or close yourself off and be sad. It is *your* decision." I have heard those words in my head almost every day since.

At the end of my 7th grade year I changed schools to a small Christian (Baptist) school. It is not an exaggeration to say that it, along with my mother's words, saved me. There were struggles of course (in a moment), but I found my church-home among my friends and mentors at the school. Though I engaged in some pretty stupid (and soul-destroying) things for a couple of years, I always found stability and, yes, a call to repent and be transformed, in the community of that school.

While in school I learned the "language" of the church. We spoke of "getting saved," of "praying Jesus into our hearts," of "altar calls," and of "giving our burdens to the Lord." I saw my mentor (my the high school principal) live out a dedicated faith expressed in his deep love and concern for me, and for all of his students. And I learned the importance of evangelism and political engagement. All of these would leave lasting impressions on me, but would also provide a source of tension and an incentive to dig more deeply into my faith (more below).

Between my freshman and sophomore years in high school, my brother and I became fast friends. We'd always pretty much hated each other before that point, but something just "clicked," and within a year we were inseparable (and so it remains to this day). He is five years older than me, and through him and his peers I was exposed to (and engaged in) some things that I should not have been. But I learned devotion and love from my brother. He came to every football game. He supported me in everything I did, and protected me when I couldn't take care of myself.

I mention this because it was through my brother that I began to notice some "theological" tension in my life. He was studying at a Christian university and I was in a Baptist high school. The first time I became aware of a difference in interpretation (not

just in instruments) was when my brother mentioned that one of his professors had referred to humans as “generally good.” But I had learned—and *knew*—that Scripture taught the universally evil nature of man, that man had been born with a “sinful nature.” We argued about it intensely (knowing us, it probably came to blows, thus proving my point), and I don’t remember the resolution (these days both positions seem wrong to me), but it doesn’t matter. What matters is that it was the first time I saw people whom I genuinely respected who disagreed fundamentally about something the Bible said. Suddenly I became aware of our different stances on baptism, church polity, everything. Here were people who demonstrated to me *real* lived Christianity, but who fundamentally disagreed with one another on something so central to Christian faith.

I also found a nagging annoyance with the constant clichés I heard in school. I can remember going to my principal and practically begging him to explain to me how to take my problems and “give them to Jesus.” It sounded wonderful... how do I do it? There was never more than a smiling, “you’ll see one day” answer, and that drove me crazy. I *wanted* to be a *Christian*, to fully live my faith, to walk in a relationship with Jesus, and if that relationship was characterized by an ability to “give up your burdens” to him, then I wanted a guide to doing it. It never came.

My junior year of high school was a transitional one. One day at school I was given a book which was called *Survival Kit*. It was a daily “quiet time” book with scripture readings, prompts for extemporaneous prayers, and reflection questions. On a whim, I got up early the next morning and began having quiet prayer and devotional times in the morning. It lasted throughout the rest of my time in high school (and would return sometime later) and was deeply enriching. I memorized large chunks of Scripture

and found its words “bouncing around” my head during the days. I did not miss a day of study and prayer. It was truly beautiful. I also noticed that my behavior was changing—I was more respectful to my parents, more friendly and encouraging to folks at school, and I found a well of joy coming up inside of me. It was probably a combination of the study & prayer along with being an upper-classman and good football player, but I genuinely had an almost invincible joy during this time. It was a great gift.

My senior year was (to that point) the best year of my life (it still ranks pretty high). I was nominated as our class “chaplain,” for some reason I didn’t know (though looking back, I can see the prophetic words of my mom and Ambrose here), and I found myself praying and speaking publicly about the gospel.

Still, something was incomplete here. I’m not positive what it was, but whenever a powerful evangelist came to chapel I would find myself answering the altar call, repenting, asking for salvation, and the like. This became another point of contention for me—I never felt like I could get to the point of relationship with God that everyone around me seemed to have. Despite my growing prayer life and spiritual development, I wasn’t able to live out the clichés I heard around me, even from the evangelists—who I believe, now, should have known better.

Apart from those moments, my senior year continued to be special. I was actually quite good at football and started receiving recruiting letters about halfway through the season. I dreamt of moving on and playing ball in college—maybe even the pros—and I set out to make myself ready for it. I lifted and ate like crazy. I ran constantly. I got myself into the best shape I possibly could. And then I sat out a year. I wasn’t ready to go off to school, so I stayed home a year and went through a semester of community college.

The following year, 1994, I went to a state in the Midwest to play football, along with my brother and two good friends from high school. Two games into the season I made a hit into the chest of a huge lineman, ducked my head, and cracked my C-5 and C-6 vertebrae. It was the end of my football days, and it was devastating. Looking back on all of this now, I recognize in myself a desire to excel, but especially in comparison with others. I suppose it's inherent in humanity to jockey for position, to find ways in which one is better than others. For me, this was the end of my worth, and I descended again into depression. I was also just lost. I had no idea what to do with life, I was far from home in the *frigid* late Fall of the Midwest, I was floundering in my classes, and I couldn't even imagine next steps. I ended up just going home in December of 1994. I was listless and scared. But God was not finished with me.

After I'd been home for some time, my mom and I were walking one evening through a Bible bookstore in the Mall. She was picking up a gift for someone, as I recall. As I wandered through it I saw, on the bottom shelf, in the corner, a small volume with the picture of a weeping man standing outside what looked like the walls of Jericho. The title read *Jeremiah: He Who Wept*, but I read "Joshua," and thought "that looks cool." I always liked the Joshua story.

I got home and started reading around 5 in the afternoon. The words of the story of the prophet tore into my soul. I saw the prophet himself struggling with the word of God, desperate to have it taken from him while reveling in the revelation... loving and hating it all at the same time. It was the same with his relationship with God's people. And I saw in him, through this narrative, myself: my own, insecure, depressive, self-important but desperate to be needed and used by God. I fell in love with that prophet,

and with his God. It was a different God than I'd known, personal, but a "consuming fire" burning within his servant. And I needed that. I read until 6 the next morning, and when I finished the book, I knew I had to be in ministry.

But how? And what to do? All I knew was that I had to. My grandfather was an elder at a small, conservative, blue collar congregation in a small, industrial Texas town. I called him that morning and asked if they needed a youth minister. He said they did, but couldn't afford one. I was hired for \$400 a month, which meant I was loaded! I started work the next week.

And once again, looking back, I see God's providence, both in taking care of me, and especially in protecting those kids from me! Because I knew *nothing* of what I was doing. It was here that God brought into my life the next important mentor in my life, Paul. The church for which I worked was actually made up of three congregations that had merged into one. Each congregation had had their own unique personality—one white collar, mostly executives for the plants in the area, the other blue collar, mostly laborers in those same plants. It was a tough situation with many challenges to unity and love, and Paul was hired into that context. He taught me both grace and courage, and he taught me how to preach and how to minister. He took me on his visitations, and under his wise tutelage I engaged in care for the widows, the sick, the dying of that congregation. I cried and I laughed, and Paul constantly engaged me in discussion and guidance. He taught me how to read the text, he helped me regain my daily devotions, and he taught me how to connect the text with people's daily lives. I sat with a good friend as his wife died from cancer, and he and Paul and I read the 23rd Psalm aloud together as she expired.

Paul taught me how to read the text with people in mind. He had an old rolodex with the names of every member of the congregation on them. He would pull 5 or 6 random cards from the rolodex as he developed his sermon in order to focus his thoughts on them, to remind him of who would be listening and to help him think of how God's word offers them words of hope, reproof, encouragement. I learned to read the bible for myself, but also for others. And I learned to take it seriously.

And the kids in my youth group loved it, too. We had three bible studies a week, not including Sundays and Wednesdays. I was discovering so much, and they were discovering it with me, teaching me and learning with me. It was a beautiful thing to read the word of God in that community. Still, I can remember struggling with pride, with the same feelings of the need of affirmation, though it was muted.

In the fall of 1996, the elders of the congregation informed me that I needed to pursue an education (they had in mind the local community college). I very strongly objected—I was *doing* ministry, and it was working out pretty well. I felt like, maybe for the first time in my life, I had a place and had found something I could do for a career—that is, something and someone I could be for the rest of my life. Education seemed like a fork in the road to me, like a meaningless endeavor that would take me away from the security I'd found.

Nevertheless, the elders were insistent (I later learned that my parents were asking them to pursue this), and a series of events took place that, to this day, make me laugh as I think about God and his work with me. Years before, Paul had attended a small preaching school some ways away, and he suggested that we go up and have a visit. We drove up on a Wednesday night, after church, in late August. The next morning we drove

over to the school. Classes had started that week, and I was certain I was only “looking” at the school, considering it for the next year (1997). As I was talking to the recruiter, one of the faculty members, Erasmus, came into the room and said “If he’s starting, he needs to be in class today, right now.” Erasmus was teaching Greek and had already had a course meeting that week. I was angry and thoroughly disoriented. “No, I’m not coming here now, I’m not going into class today. I’m just here to make everyone shut up about the education thing for a while.” I remember thinking those exact words. I could feel my face getting red and hot as I stood up, was handed a stack of books, and proceeded into the classroom. I sat in a fog as we proceeded through the Greek alphabet. Though I’d been raised in the church and been working in ministry for almost two years, I was shockingly ignorant about some things. I remember thinking, sitting there in class, “Why Greek?! Spanish I can understand, I could use, but who speaks Greek?!” I didn’t learn until the next class meeting that the New Testament was actually written in Greek, and the Old in Hebrew. Regardless, I found myself in shock as we drove home. I had registered for classes; I would have to move to the area of the school *that weekend*. And I was angry about it, it was most definitely *not* what I wanted, it wasn’t even my idea!

After an emotional goodbye that Sunday with my kids, I headed to school. I sat in Greek and Biblical World (an archaeology course) and General Introduction to the Bible and I was blown away. This represented a different kind of awakening for me. Suddenly things I’d always held certain were challenged. Over the next couple of years my understanding of preaching and developing sermons went from proof-texting to exegesis. I learned about the synoptic problem; I had a seminar on the documentary hypothesis (it was more an apologetic session defending single-authorship, though not necessarily

Mosaic). I learned to argue my points dispassionately and logically. It was a beautiful time, and I fell deeply in love with scholarship. I thought, at the time, that *now* I had discovered what I had been created to be.

After a year at school, in the summer of 1997, I went to an Eastern European country on a mission effort. I went with a professor and a team of students from the school. The wall had come down and this country was abuzz with interest in the Bible and (Western) Christianity. I went into that mission confidently: I had had a year of academic study, therefore I knew *everything*. I'll never forget my feeling as I sat across from a beautiful young lady who had come for Bible study. I searched inside myself for the words: where to start, what to say, how to say it? I didn't have any answers. That night I lay in bed and wept and prayed, begging God to give me *something* to say to these people. I realized that I knew *nothing*, that I had *nothing* to offer. It would be a neat story if that had changed, if I woke up the next day with revelation and drew many people to the Lord. But it was not to be so. And I believe that, too, was providential. I left that country not just humbled, but humiliated. The people were so kind and even loving, but for all of my confidence and training, I'd had nothing to say that I felt was important, that really could have changed their lives. I began to wonder what I ought to be studying, how to integrate what I'd learned with what I did.

But I didn't wonder for long. School started back, and the simple joy of academic study set in again as I lost myself in philosophical discussions of ethics and systematic theology and apologetics. A new pharaoh was in town, and he forgot (briefly) about that humiliation and questioning.

Then in December of 1997 I met one of the most beautiful people I've ever known. I met her online—the story is long and not apropos to this discussion—before online was cool. After I graduated the Center we were married, on June 27th 1998 (and July 25th 1998; another story). Jennifer was amazing. I found that I had studied and learned all of these things, and when I would come home I would see Jenny living what I had only been learning. Her life was utterly driven for caring for others. She would give all that she had to the kids of every congregation we went to, organizing activities and food and Christmas plays. She never said no. And she was beautifully happy. And she made me happy, at every moment. I can remember arguing once or twice, but I can't remember once being unhappy. It was a blissful time as we prayed and read and loved and served together.

Then in the Fall of 1998 we moved to central Texas and both started classes at a small seminary. We took our classes together and we would talk about what we'd learned on the drives back and forth from school. We made good friends—lifelong friends, and we found a church home, a small and loving congregation. The summer of 1998 to early winter 2000 were the happiest years of my life.

I was also thoroughly loving school. At the seminary I learned in practice the meaning of “faith seeking understanding,” as we studied and learned about things that challenged the fundamentalism I had learned in high school. Tensions in the text I'd not seen or rationalized away were taken seriously and yet the authority and power of Scripture was not denied. I found so much joy in those years in study, in tearing down long-held rigidity. So many things I'd believed were disrupted, and while it was disorienting, it was utterly liberating. It was like discovering God for the first time.

It was also challenging to cultural assumptions. I was exposed to diversity at school that I'd not experienced before. I sat in class with Presbyterians and Baptists and Catholics who all (at least to my eyes) lived more Christian lives than I did. And so I had to re-think my understandings of "who's in" and "who's out." In one class, a worship class, I sat with a lady who objected to the use of "Father" in the Lord's Prayer. I reacted strongly to this, in my head, but when she explained that her father had assaulted her and that using that word for God was inappropriate, scales fell from my eyes, in a sense. I saw that life experience colors how we read Scripture, and that some people's life experiences were quite different from mine. And I learned in that diverse atmosphere to love people that I completely disagreed with. It was beautiful.

Other things happened, though. It's interesting, and I'd not noticed this until writing this piece, that my poetry stopped about the time I started serious academic study. Somewhere in the midst of my academic study at these two schools the poet inside me died. I also found myself struggling to preach. Whereas before I was filled with passion for the transformative power of preaching and the Scriptures, I found myself fixating on critical issues in the text, even to things such as Pauline authorship. The synoptic problem even made it into a sermon or two. And I was struggling to make any kind of meaningful connection between what I was preaching and people's (even my own) lives. I didn't struggle that hard, though, because I rationalized this failing by saying "preaching's not my calling, I'm going to be a scholar."

I only slightly noticed at the time that I was not engaged in spiritual devotion anymore. Anytime I realized that I was not praying or reading Scripture at set times I

would say to myself (and even out loud a few times) “I study the Bible all the time, for a living!” I replaced my spiritual devotion with academic study.

I also developed an overly high opinion of scholars, and of my place among them. I saw scholars as almost prophetic, tearing down the walls of ignorance of the poor benighted preachers and ministers. *That* was the class I wanted to be in. And I wanted to be somebody, someone that would be known as a great “theologian,” someone like Karl Barth. And in some ways I saw myself as that already—I performed well in my classes, carried a 4.0, and was preparing to enter graduate school and thinking about my options.

Then in September of 1999 I learned that Jennifer was pregnant, that I was going to be a dad. It wasn’t a surprise, but it was a beautiful shock. On April 21, 2000 I stood in the hospital room as my beautiful wife gave birth to my beautiful daughter, and I wept, thanking God. I think it was the first time I’d talked to him in a while.

In June of 2000 I lost Jennifer. She woke with a headache on June 14th, and after a short struggle (that I don’t feel like rehearsing right now) with septic shock she succumbed on June 16th, leaving me in the scorching heat with an 8 week old baby girl. I was utterly broken mentally and spiritually. I can remember hearing my own voice crying out “Why have you forsaken me” as the monitors screamed the stopping of her heart. I lived on a diet of tears. I lost 12 pounds in two weeks as I lived on crackers and water.

I found, though, that my studies and my professors offered respite and hope. I buried myself in the critical study of Scripture, and I explored hard questions with professors who were wise enough to know they didn’t have all of the answers—indeed that they had no answer at all. I prayed and cried with a particular professor for hours.

But I hardly prayed at all on my own. I couldn't. I didn't have any words, I didn't know what to say.

Since that formative event many things have grown and changed, of course. I quickly realized the futility of being a “known” theologian (could there be *anyone* less useful and less important than a modern theologian of note?!) and the pointlessness of my arrogance. As time passed and I kept having experiences that I wished Jenny would have been a part of, I realized that within a generation no one would know her. They might know *about* her, but after I and my in-laws and family are gone, no one will have known her. And she was the person in my life most worth knowing.

I took a job at the school which I had attended and continued my academic work. And I still didn't pray. And I still struggled to preach. But I began to see connections between the Word and my life, again. Our joint headstone and the bench at our grave were etched with words of Scripture “Where shall I go from your presence? ... If I lie down in the grave, behold, you are there.” “I am the resurrection and the life... those who believe in me, though they die, yet shall they live.” I did an exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5, focusing on the intermediate state of the dead—which was no longer a purely academic question for me. “Where is she?”

And I saw God at work, too, in the beauty growing in front of me in that little girl. I learned to trust again, painfully, as my daughter struggled through a couple of pretty severe childhood illnesses. I wept bitterly to God as I sat with her in a rocking chair for hours, holding a breathing mask over her face while she fought an RSV. But I marveled at her complete innocence in it all, her lack of complaining and her constant concern for others. She does not know, I don't think, how profoundly her continued and constant

faith-life has served as inspiration and model to me of how one might live as a Christian. When I look at how she treats other people, I experience both guilt and joy, guilt because I recognize my own shortcomings herein, and joy because she's mine. I pray that someday I might live up to her example.

I also saw God bring light into the darkness in my heart again, as well. I didn't think I'd ever marry again, really. That of course changed. And it was beautiful. It has also been spiritually transformative, in its own way. When I met my fiancé we were both already "adults," meaning that we have had to do a lot of *intentional* stretching and growing to build a lasting relationship on a beautiful beginning. Our time together continues to awaken growth in me as we recognize and work together through old scars toward new life. It's been so much fun and so challenging and so transforming. I have seen in her a willingness to change, to grow, to be shaped and an openness to become what I have needed her to be. It is a beautiful thing.

I have also, of course, been witness to the faith I learned as a child lived out by my folks. I have read and talked many times about God's love as it is given through us, but I have had difficulties making those teachings reality in my own life. My folks have been, through my insecurities and torments and joys, my rock. They have been and are living gospels, testifying to the glorious truth of Jesus Christ.

Still, it would be some years before I would begin asking questions about my own spiritual development. I began the PhD at Texas State in 2011, and that was a life-changing thing for me. I was in a room full of beautiful people with whom it would not be possible for me to have *less* in common. It was a PhD in education, and thus

completely out of my field. It was at a secular university, and I was a bit nervous, considering my training and theological commitments. But it was beautiful.

About half way through the program, one of my favorite professors—a man of limitless energy and abounding in hope, despite the challenges facing him and his community—gently chastised me for my academic bent. I won't use his exact (and graphic) words, but he basically told me that, if my learning and theorizing never changed the world around me because I didn't interact with the world around me, my learning was useless and to some extent even I was useless! All I could hear in my head at the time was “you study the Scriptures diligently because you think in them you have eternal life...” For all of their knowledge about the Scriptures, the Pharisees were missing, completely, the working out of them before their eyes. And so was I. So long as the Bible was “academic,” so long as church history and theology remain in the classroom but not in how I act and treat others and strive for justice and hope, they are not truly Christian.

Then, shortly after I'd started my program, a friend (and fellow student) from years before came on faculty at the seminary where I worked. He and I had gone way back, of course, and I'd known him from my more arrogant days. I never told him, but I could never quite understand why he wanted to be in ministry. I'd thought it was a job to have while he put himself through grad school, but I never believed it should be his calling. He was the brightest person I'd ever met. Why would he want to do ministry? But it was *this* desire, his dedication to ministry first and his scholarship as a supplement to that ministry that has challenged me most of all. He is, first, a missionary.

And so the last couple of years have re-kindled in me the calling that whispered in my ear through that book all those years ago. I believe theological education to be useless if it isn't transformative, if it doesn't lead to a different life, a de-centered self. I want to be that person. But I'll be honest: at this point, I'm not there yet. I don't pray regularly. I don't engage in daily spiritual devotion. But I want to, and I am committed to trying and, in God's providence, directing my life in his paths. I want to write poetry again.

John Mark. John Mark is a white male in his mid-30s who has served as both an education and now preaching minister in a large congregation among a Congregationalist tradition in an urban area in the southern U.S. He was raised in a household dedicated to service of God and neighbor, and this was reinforced in his small, rural congregation as a child and young man.

His childhood and young-adult years were formative in his Christian faith. Throughout his spiritual autobiography John Mark explained the importance of the mentoring he received in Christian love and duty from his parents. He spoke of his father's dedicated service to a member of the congregation—an older, disabled widow—who was in need of transportation to and from church services as well as other kinds of general care—maintenance around her house, etc. John Mark spoke of his father performing these tasks in this way,

He never complained. He would walk through the doors around 9:00 on Sunday evening [after driving the member home] as the rest of us had enjoyed our dinner and television. In my father, I witnessed a genuine love of people, even those who proved to be a challenge to love. His weekly trips in picking up [the fellow

member] was perhaps the greatest gospel sermon that I ever heard, and it continues to have an impact on my faith to this day.

In addition to the formative influence of his family, John Mark mentioned the centrality of community in shaping his spirituality. John Mark explains that, while he did well in athletics and enjoyed team sports, he did not have good relationships with his peers, due especially to their constant bragging of sexual conquest and partying. In the midst of this, John Mark explained, “This congregation became my family. And during my high school years, when I felt even more isolated from my peers, this little congregation would serve as an oasis in a very dry wilderness.” While John Mark found it difficult to socially integrate into the athlete culture, then, he found in his church family a safe haven.

Because I did not join in [with the partying, etc.], I quickly became the target of abuse. I have never felt so alone than on those long bus rides home with my peers. ... And the abuse never really let up. I would have individuals come up to me and tell me how much they respected me for standing up for my faith...the same guys who would sit in silence when the jesting started. I did not always handle the abuse well. I became pretty adept at coming up with my own zingers to belittle those who targeted me. But I have never felt so alone.

John Mark then went on to contrast this with his experience at the little congregation that became his safe space:

But the truth is I was not alone. Each week, I would spend time with the family of God. I would enter into our worship auditorium with wounded pride, beaten down by the onslaught of insults to find acceptance and love from people who deeply

cared for my faith. Older brothers in Christ would take an interest in my life and my sports. Older sisters would hug me and let me know how much they loved me. And although I didn't know it at the time, my faith was being forged and refined.... Through these people, God was binding up my wounds and giving strength to my weary knees.

During John Mark's presentation of this part of his spiritual autobiography, he had to pause due to the surge of emotions that overcame him. Specifically, when he reached the portion about "Older brothers in Christ..." he paused, his eyes filling with tears and his voice coming in choked gasps, as he remembered "one dear brother who passed away my senior year." John Mark found in his congregation a social setting which provided a safe space for him to pursue spiritual formation. It also mentored that formation in its treatment of him and others. He would take this formation in community with him to college and beyond.

John Mark originally went to college to study engineering, but realized—through a conversation with a respected peer-mentor—toward the end of his freshman year that he did not enjoy the field and "was made for something else than pursuing stability." He determined through this conversation and reflection upon it that he wanted to enact his faith, and to "walk by faith and not by sight...." Following this, John Mark changed his major to mathematics in order to become a teacher in order to pursue a career path that, as he pointed out in an epiphany during the presentation of his spiritual autobiography, "made a difference."

During his time at university, John Mark became a part of a large and very active college ministry group. Through his time studying and reflecting with this group, as well

as engaging in mission work and ministry with them, he had several spiritually formative experiences that led to transformation in life-goals and direction. John Mark explained that, during his time with this college group, “The isolation of high school became a distant memory as I immersed myself in the life of this ministry. There is not enough space to talk about how my four years in [this program] shaped me spiritually.”

Specifically, John Mark mentioned three incidents in his time with this group that were transformative for him, one of which is the conversation with the older student recorded above. A second formative event was a Bible study that challenged the heart of what John Mark thought about Christianity. The question was asked, by the facilitator (a middle school principle who was volunteering to teach the group), “Why do we obey God?” John Mark explained,

He then offered three categories and told stories about some students who were called to his office who correlated with these categories. These included obedience because of our need to follow the rules, a common sense of morality, and a final category which I had not ever considered. We obey God because we want to please.... I fell safely into the category of obeying out of rule following. I am a closet rule follower. But I had never thought of obedience to God in terms of relationship. This lesson represented a significant paradigm shift in the way I viewed God.

This shift in “ideas,” a transformation of cognitive understanding of both God and “rule-following,” would have lasting, transformative impact on John Mark and his approach to ministry.

In addition to these formative moments, John Mark described the impact of a mission trip to an impoverished nation in East Asia upon his faith. He explained that, though he grew up in a rural area, he had not seen poverty like this before. It began to place in context his own blessings in life and he began to reevaluate long held ideas of wealth, poverty, and privilege. At this time he was also introduced to a structured prayer guide and silent, meditative prayer during a day long retreat. He explained that,

At first, I resented having a structure (low church background in play here), but after an hour of working through the first cycle [of scripture reading, prayer, meditation, and exercise], I found the structure to be a breath of fresh air. I spent the whole day in solitude, fasting and praying, and walking around a strange city where I barely knew the language and the culture. But this day was pivotal in shaping a rhythm of daily devotional that admittedly would lie dormant for many years.

John Mark explained that, though these habitual daily practices would disappear for a few years after graduation, they returned and now form an indispensable part of his spiritual practices in ministry.

Ultimately, following his graduation with a B.S. (and a couple of years teaching math), John Mark determined, through prayer and reflection, that he was called to ministry. He began researching institutions for ministry training and found a small, focused seminary in his tradition through which he would pursue and receive a Master's degree in theological studies. During his time in seminary he worked part time in youth ministry at a local congregation.

John Mark has been in full-time ministry for a little less than a decade. He is modest with a self-deprecating humor, and though he already bears some of the scars of ministry—the thousand-yard-stare that comes to those who have walked through the valleys of human tragedies with their congregations (cf. Zurheide, 1997)—his eyes are alight with compassion and good humor. He describes a struggle with developing a sustained prayer life and developing spiritual disciplines prior to his ministry work, but the interview revealed that the structure provided by formal, full-time ministry has allowed his spiritual disciplines to flourish. John Mark plans on working in ministry for the remainder of his working life. He explained that the church “remains a haven for me,” and that he is committed to remaining in service to the church.

Phoebe. Phoebe is a white woman in her late-70s who has served in several ministry positions as well as teaching in public schools throughout her adult life. Like John Mark, Phoebe was raised in the church and has remained and served in her Congregationalist tradition throughout her life—despite the extremely limited role it has allowed for women.

Phoebe’s family was active in the church. Her father worked in oil fields and ports but also spent his weekends serving various churches around the areas in which he worked, preaching and leading singing and the like for churches who could not afford local ministers. Here, Phoebe expresses, she first became aware of some of the disparities in the treatment of the sexes among her tradition. Her father was an intelligent man, but not gifted in writing. Phoebe noted that

To prepare his sermons he and my mother would study together, and then my mother would write the sermon. I thought it was weird that she could do that but

couldn't get up and say anything. I also thought it was strange that since my dad couldn't carry the proverbial tune in a bucket, a woman started the songs but he stood at the front "leading." Who were we fooling?

This issue would come to a head for Phoebe years later (more in the analysis) and her parents would play an important role in her re-evaluation of these kinds of practices.

During these early years, Phoebe notes, her experience at home was juxtaposed with her experience at church. While her parents generally shared the beliefs of the very sectarian denomination of which she was a part, they were "not as quick to condemn as others were," Phoebe expressed, and they treated others around them with love regardless of the circumstances. This was illustrated for Phoebe in how they interacted with her grandmother, who acted hatefully toward Phoebe and Phoebe's mother. Nevertheless, Phoebe's mother explained that, though "trips to visit her were painful," they would continue to visit the grandmother because "it was the right thing to do." From this, Phoebe explained, she learned that "even though it might not make you happy, you still did the right thing."

This kind of gracious, unconditional love was not often practiced in the churches of Phoebe's experience. She found in church a people (and a God) quick to condemn, and she found herself in "fear of hellfire" regularly. In her spiritual autobiography, Phoebe juxtaposed this broken, condemning community with expression of Christian love she found at home: "The kind of love I experienced at home was often not the kind of love I saw practiced at church. I was safe at home, but sometimes church was scary."

After high school, Phoebe attended a small college associated with her tradition. Here, she explains, she found a different vision altogether of what her faith could be and

her place within it. She began as a biology major, but ended up changing her major to education (which she explained was a providential decision that led to much fulfillment for her). While at college she heard her Bible professors talk about God's mercy, the Holy Spirit, grace, and more, and "in ways that made God's story take on new meaning and significance." She immediately contrasted this, though, with the community at church: "While this was encouraging and thought provoking, church was still church. 'We're right and everyone else is wrong' prevailed.

After graduation from college, Phoebe faced one of the most difficult challenges to her spirituality: she was isolated in a small, rural town, teaching in a school, and her fellow Christians were either utterly hypocritical or self-righteous, or both. She found herself drifting away from the church, and for the first time in her life she stopped attending services. This would change when she began attending a state university in a nearby city for graduate work and discovered another congregation whose preacher reflected the more nuanced picture of God she had received in college. The experience with this congregation encouraged her enough to return to her other congregation and re-engage in her spiritual journey.

Phoebe met her husband one night after returning to her old congregation, and she describes it as a life-changing experience. He was "charming and wonderful and full of love and joy," and Phoebe was drawn immediately to him. He challenged her to re-think the rigorous, sectarian tradition in which she'd grown up. Phoebe explains that, following their engagement,

Somehow during the intervening months, through my tears and fears, and with [her husband's] patience and our long discussions, I finally could believe that

grace, hope, love and forgiveness were available, that I was loved beyond measure by the God who created me, and I was his child. It was like the sun had finally broken through ... the rain was gone....

After this experience, Phoebe was drawn toward ministry—a difficult calling in a Christian tradition that was opposed to expanded roles for women in the church’s ministry. She began by co-working with her husband, serving in campus ministries in various universities. Ultimately they would serve at a congregation in a cosmopolitan urban area, establishing a bible chair at a major university.

Here, several important developments took place. The first congregation which Phoebe and her husband attended was actively engaged in the questions surrounding an expanded role for women serving in churches in her tradition. The congregation became for Phoebe and her family a new community of support and love.

Additionally, Phoebe’s husband came to play a central role in developing a “bible chair” at a major university in the city. He was insistent that the professors at the chair carry the same credentials as their counterparts in other institutions of higher learning—specifically terminal degrees—and this led to an engagement with scholars who had been educated at some of the best graduate schools in the U.S. This engagement with scholarship outside of the more fundamentalist stance of the churches of her growing-up led to some challenging (and beautiful) re-imagining of her understanding of the Bible and Christian faith.

Phoebe’s husband would play another critical role in her life. After decades of marriage, Phoebe’s husband informed her one day that he was in fact same-sex oriented and had been hiding this from her and from the world for his entire life. Shortly after this

revelation, he left her and their children to pursue his own life (though Phoebe stresses that he continued to care for the children financially). Phoebe was devastated, angry, confused. She wrote very candidly of her anger—both at her husband and at God. For many years she wrestled with this difficult event, but she and her family found hope in the congregation they attended.

Additionally, this provided Phoebe the opportunity of an “epistemological shudder.” She began to question and re-evaluate long-held beliefs, and she continues to do so to this day. She has slowly developed into the role of advocate for the church’s interaction with the gay community, arguing that the church’s harsh response has been both unbiblical and harmful. Phoebe has experienced transformation here through the harsh teacher of experience and critical reflection.

Today, Phoebe is “retired” and serving in a church in the southwest U.S. She continues to see herself as “becoming,” as a “soul in process” (as she would say). She explained that

I was totally unprepared for an experience with people in need. I had never really served poor people beyond donating clothes and food. We opened a Sunday morning breakfast and Bible class in the building where folks came each week for food and clothing. A family—father, mother, and four children—appeared that did not know Christ and had virtually nothing and a background of survival that was difficult to understand. Along the way, God convinced our home group—six single women—to love this family. I was not sure I wanted to “get involved.”

Since was the only retiree, and available on a daily basis, I got the calls. It was

another world. But now it's been six years, and today the family is assisting [our minister] as this ministry grows and reaches those in all kinds of needs in this city. Phoebe's enthusiasm for continual transformation and renewal is immediately evident and seen in her smile. She is dedicated to continuing to grow into the image of Christ.

Stephen. Stephen is a mid-30 year old white man from the central U.S. Stephen was raised in a conservative free church tradition in a rural community. This community was, almost by definition, sectarian and fundamentalist. In a telling insight, Stephen began his spiritual autobiography with a quote from Lauren F. Winner (2013, xii-xiv),

And yet in those same moments of strained belief, of not knowing where or if God is, it has also seemed that the Christian story keeps explaining who and where I am, better than any other story I know. On the days when I think I have a fighting chance at redemption, at change, I understand it to be these words and these rituals and these people who will change me. Some days I am not sure if my faith is riddled with doubt or whether, graciously, my doubt is riddled with faith. And yet I continue to live in a world the way a religious person lives in the world; I keep living in a world that I know to be enchanted, and not left alone. I doubt; I am uncertain; I am restless, prone to wander. And yet glimmers of the holy keep interrupting my gaze.

Stephen's story represents, then, a long journey of faith in which he interacts with doubt and hope.

Stephen begins his own story by unintentionally juxtaposing his broken home life and his loving acceptance into the local congregation at baptism (more below). He found love and hope in this congregation which became a solace to him when dealing with his

broken family life at home. He also found himself aware of some problems, and he writes of a recognition that the little congregation saw itself as a part of the “only true church.” This would come to be a problem for Stephen when he became a minister in his tradition. Ultimately, he would find himself becoming an advocate against sectarianism and fundamentalism within his tradition.

In high school Stephen experienced a traumatic event that challenged his understanding of Christianity and church. Stephen’s best friend was killed in a car accident, and Stephen writes, “Everyone was devastated.” His friends’ parents

Tried to find the positive in a tragic event. They used his death to try and get people to give their lives to Christ. Many teenagers who had never contemplated their mortality were thinking about it for the first time. My friend and his parents were Baptist. Conversion for them was saying the sinner’s prayer. This was different from my understanding of conversion. I soon found myself in a room with my friend’s father and he was asking me questions about my salvation that I did not have answers for. I finally gave in and said the sinner’s prayer. I was not convinced that it was something I needed to do...

Ultimately, Stephen writes, he would come to resent having been “manipulated” into praying this prayer in his grief, though he stressed that he did not blame his friends’ parents in their grief. This event, though, became something of an “epistemological shudder” for Stephen. He explained that he became wary of many of the tactics of evangelism (and even evangelism itself) in use around him. “I made a commitment never to trick someone into becoming a Christian,” Stephen explained.

Stephen went to college with a desire to study journalism. He explains that ministry was not even remotely on his mind in terms of vocation. But as he was in college, he became aware of a small preaching school in his area and began taking (unaccredited) night courses for his own personal enrichment. After about a year, the director of the school started asking Stephen to preach at various local congregations who were without a preacher. Though he was uncomfortable with it, Stephen agreed to some part time preaching work.

At the same time, Stephen began taking some religion courses on offer at his university, and he explains that these courses—which involved actually reading the primary sources of church history and engaging critically with the texts of the Bible—challenged some of his “long held beliefs.” This, in combination with his experience at the death of his friend, would lead to a major evaluation of his beliefs and commitments in his first full time ministry commitment.

After graduation, Stephen accepted a full time position in ministry. He was married by now and took the position partly out of a need for employment, but also because he had developed a calling to ministry through his study. It was during this posting, however, that Stephen experienced a major challenge to his unexamined beliefs. His congregation became embroiled in a major dispute over fine points of doctrine with other churches (and the preaching school Stephen had attended), and Stephen explained that the actions and attitudes he witnessed during this situation were so antithetical to what he saw as the ethics of the gospel that it shook him to his core. He systematically studied and re-evaluated his beliefs, and almost left ministry over them. He determined to continue on in his studies and pursued a Master’s degree at a seminary in his tradition.

The seminary would prove to be another critical engagement of his beliefs, and he would find therein both comfort and concern as he evaluated what he had believed.

At the same time, he moved from his rural home town to be near the seminary. Stephen explained that during this time he has become an advocate for change within his tradition, trying to draw his congregation toward a more just community. In our sessions together, Stephen exhibited a kindness and Christ-like demeanor that is evident in someone spiritually formed by the gospel of Christ.

Timothy. Timothy is an early-40s African-American pastor in a Baptist church in a major urban area in the south. Some of his earliest memories are of sitting in the sanctuary of the Baptist church in which he grew up. He wrote that he has few memories from that time that are not from his meeting with the church. Timothy was involved in the church from very early in his life. His mother told him that, when he was a very young child, he “would leave the pews where the family was sitting and actually go into the pulpit and sit on our Pastor’s lap.”

Timothy attended an historic Baptist church—the oldest African American Baptist Church in the county. It had been formed by slaves who met in the basement of another church while their masters met in the building above them. This church would prove to be vital to Timothy’s formation, and he expressed that it “is not only historical in the life of our city; it would also prove to be a training ground for me.”

Timothy was highly involved in the church until he left for college. In college however, Timothy explained that he “lost his way” a bit. He tried to discover a direction for his life, still not believing that ministry was his calling. He wrestled with several

different possibilities, and his grades suffered, but ultimately he was asked by another person at college if he “knew Jesus.” Timothy wrote,

I could not believe this guy was actually trying to evangelize *me*. I have been in church my entire life, singing, speaking, and representing God for as long as I could remember. How dare him. Then the Spirit convicted me and said, “He picked you out because you do not stand out.” I realized that I did not live and publicly demonstrate the life I professed within the four walls of the church. I knew my life had to be different.

Following this moment of conversion, Timothy pursued ministry and advocacy, continuing his education through two Master’s degrees in theology and now working toward a DMin. Seminary has challenged him further, he explained, by causing him to question his more fundamentalist beliefs and by bringing him into contact with diverse experiences and interpretations of Scripture. Timothy has a commanding presence and his eyes are full of kindness. He exhibits a Christ-filled life.

Summary of Findings

Themes drawn from data

Having presented a phenomenological account of the participants’ experience of formation, I now turn to data analysis. Phenomenological study is resistant of analysis, instead opting for description. Analysis can reduce a phenomenon to abstraction. As Van Manen (1990) has explained, phenomenological research recognizes the presence of knowledge in the event itself—that is, it asks the question “What is this phenomenon in its whatness” (p. 33)? In order to explore the knowledge of the experience itself, then, data for this study was collected initially through the group discussions as it arose from

the text in moments of epiphany (cf. Denzin, 2014; also cf. Miles & Huberman, 1994). This experiential exploration of the narrative constructs provided by the participants allowed for further phenomenological exploration of the experience of the writing and presentation of the narratives themselves. From the narratives, themes emerged which proved central to the lasting spiritual formation of the participants. Following this, I applied Napier's (N.d.) schema of lasting change to each of the themes to organize data. Here, then, I present first the themes which emerged from the initial group discussion of the data.

The importance of Community. Perhaps the most prominent theme to emerge from the data—both written and interview data—is the importance of community in the spiritually formed life. In the case of each participant, communities factored both positively and negatively in participants' experiences. In some cases, negative experiences with community provided motivation to participants to seek out and create different values (especially the value of care, cf. Noddings, 2002) in their own lives and in the lives of persons around them. In others, community provided a respite from unhealthy communities. Regardless, in either case, it became increasingly revealed throughout the interviews and discussions that community and community development played a vital role in the formative lives of the participants.

During the first group session following the presentation of my own spiritual autobiography, Stephen was the first presenter and interviewee. Stephen began his spiritual autobiography by introducing readers to his early childhood in the church and his home life, which was, in his own words, idyllic. Stephen explained that “some of my most vivid memories from my childhood are of being in worship.” The people of the

church were a “second family,” in Stephen’s words. There were hints, though, of trouble in this community, problems endemic to churches in North America of a generation ago—in Stephen’s case, this would be seen in radical sectarianism, with which Stephen was uncomfortable but unable to critically engage at the time.

Stephen’s home life was similar to his church experience. As a child, he was unaware of any tension between his parents, and his home was full of life. “All of this would be shaken,” Stephen explained, when his parents became divorced during his pre-teen years. Stephen’s tone in his autobiography shifts at this moment, and he begins to describe life in a broken home and community:

My brother took it pretty hard. I remember him crying himself to sleep on more than one occasion. I tried to stay strong, but I had no idea how this would impact the rest of my life. There would be custody battles and weekend visits. Life would never be the same.

In his autobiography, Stephen moves immediately from this paragraph to a description of his life in the church. Around this time Stephen was baptized, and he described with rapture the moment of his acceptance into the church:

My grandfather baptized me in that small little church with all those nice people. After I had gotten dried off, I walked out into the auditorium where I was greeted by a group of men who were ready to shame my hand. One of the men greeted me by saying, “Welcome to the brotherhood!” It was a joyous evening, and I relished all the attention.

During the group discussion of Stephen’s autobiography, one of the participants commented on Stephen’s immediate juxtaposition of his broken home life with his life in

the church. This proved to be a true epiphany (cf. Van Manen, 1990) even to Stephen, who had not intentionally (or consciously!) developed his autobiography with this juxtaposition in mind. It led to a powerful, emotional moment of silence from Stephen. This led the group to begin reflecting on ways community has served as spiritually formative in each of their own lives, and it emerged as an obvious and important theme.

The theme of community factored heavily in all of the participants. Timothy, for instance, writes of the importance of community in forming his character both as a Christian minister and as an activist. From an early age, church members and family members told Timothy that he was going to be a minister. The community would serve as a place for the development of his faith and spiritual gifts of service. It also made him aware of history and the important place that ministers played in the civil rights movement. Timothy explained that the church in which he worshipped was founded by slaves who worshipped in the basement of a church building while their masters joined together upstairs. He spoke with pride of attending “the oldest African-American Baptist church” in his city. “This church is not only historical in the life of our city; it would also prove to be a training ground for me.”

The community at First Baptist included Timothy in everything: he engaged in every act of leadership available to a boy, from singing in the choir to usher to youth ministry. Throughout this time, the community nurtured within Timothy a “calling” to serve God’s people in ministry. “You’re going to be a preacher,” they would say to him. This constant reinforcement, as well as the provision of a space to exercise leadership and agency, served to provide Timothy a different community and a different story. Though

Timothy would struggle with his place in the church in college, the community's provision and acceptance would draw him back to his reordered desires (Smith, 2009).

Likewise, Phoebe found solace and spiritual formation in churches. For Phoebe, as for Stephen, this was true both positively and negatively. Her early experiences with church were a study of contrasts. In her father's service in the church and in her parent devoted Christian lives she saw the beauty that was possible in community and she longed for a place to be in that community. Negatively, she also experienced exclusion due to her gender, and she experienced severe sectarianism and legalism, explaining that

What I was taught at home matched what I was taught at church, but with a much softer touch. . . . In my high school Bible class I remember the teacher explaining that a wife was usually at fault in a divorce, that drinking was wrong and so was dancing, and grace was something the Baptists taught. It was simple, there were rules to be followed, and if you followed them, God would love you. Otherwise, I understood hell was waiting. As I grew up, many of my responses to Christian living were prompted by fear.

In her home, however, Phoebe explained that, while her parents generally held to the beliefs of their congregations, they encouraged her to critically reflect upon and engage those beliefs. Phoebe would find a different kind of community both at college and in her later church experience that would provide her a home in her most difficult times.

Ultimately, Phoebe would find the rich, transformative community after experiencing her tragic divorce. As the family circled together to decide how to move forward together, one decision they had to make was whether or not to stay at their home

congregation—with which they had been worshipping and ministering for many years. In her spiritual autobiography, regarding this decision, Phoebe explained that

The kids and I discussed it. At some point [one of the kids] said that we should definitely stay. I asked why. He said, “Because they love us.” The girls agreed. And in the following months, did they ever! [This congregation] put their arms around us, and God came near.... They loved us.

In this community, Phoebe explained in the group discussion, she found a space of love and care that provided her the fortitude to carry on, both in her Christian walk and in ministry. Ultimately, Phoebe would enter into formal ministry within this congregation—no small accomplishment for a woman in her theological tradition.

The power of community in formation, however, is perhaps best evidenced in John Mark’s spiritual autobiography and subsequently in his presentation. For John Mark, though the church he attended (and which his parents “planted”) provided both safe haven and a place to practice his faith. While his peers at the local high school engaged in “sexual conquest” and the general mistreatment of others, John Mark was focused on maintaining a Christian ethic of care and chastity. In his own words, he was mocked “mercilessly” for this decision. The church, though, offered respite and comfort and love to John Mark and gave him the fortitude to carry on. The church taught him the value and worth of *others*. He learned from this small, rural congregation that Christians were never to use others as “means rather than ends in themselves, because everyone is created by God and in his image.”

Throughout his autobiography John Mark evidences the importance of community, whether in his home congregation or later in college or in the congregation

in which he's currently ministering. The Christian communities of which John Mark has been a part have played vital roles in shaping him spiritually through providing him a space of encouragement and hope and belonging.

Community, then, has proven to be an important theme in the spiritual formation of the participants. In many ways this is another way in which contemporary theological education stands counter to the Enlightenment, modernist vision of "mankind" as autonomous, tradition- and superstition- free beings (cf. Middleton & Walsh, 1995). Rather, each participant found within community a vital place of growth—whether through support or tension or both. And, as in the early monastic schools (Cannell, 2006), this communal engagement was vital to their formation as Christians. Insofar as community has been shown to be important to spiritual formation and the development of communal responsibility (cf. Quezada, 2011; Norton, 2012; Saines, 2009), then, it is vital that seminaries consider ways in which community might be incorporated into the *formal* curriculum. It is noteworthy, here, that participants' seminary experience includes very limited discussion of community (if at all).

The importance of the "epistemological shudder." A second factor which figures prominently in the spiritual autobiographies of participants regarding their spiritual formation is the challenging of long-held and unexamined beliefs and ideas. In keeping with what the research has shown, though (e.g. Smith, 2009), these challenges are rarely (if ever) purely rational and almost always involve both an emotional, existential component as well as rational, reflective work. In the case of the participants, it involved the collision of these ideas with experiences in their lives.

This can be seen in all of the narratives, including my own. Certainly there are moments of pure intellectual/rational transformation, as long-held ideas were challenged by academic study. For myself, I began to recognize tensions in the text of Scripture I had not seen before, and these were important, critical challenges to my inherited (and unexamined) faith. I wrote that I found great joy in these years of study. The participants also reflected, in group discussion of my autobiography, of their transformation through critical study as well. There is no doubt that seminary—with its critical eye and academic biblical and theological commitments—played a spiritually formative role in each participants' life in this study. Phoebe wrote of her transformation away from her sectarian church commitment through her academic study of Scripture, when she came to realize that “we’re right and everyone else is wrong” became a much more difficult commitment to maintain in the light of the ambiguities of interpretation. John Mark and Stephen also mentioned the key role interaction with the intellectual commitments of seminary academic study played in their transformation toward a more inclusive, nuanced faith concerned with the care of others.

While purely rational study and reflection challenged personal belief and led to spiritual formation, it is evident that the collision of belief and experience is a very powerful force in spiritual formation. As I reflected upon the factors important to my own spiritual formation, I saw several places in which experience challenged taken-for-granted truths. Sometimes this involved challenging some of the tropism of Evangelical Christianity. For example, I wrote of my frustration in high school regarding some of the Christian clichés I regularly heard:

I also found a nagging annoyance with the constant clichés I heard in school. I can remember going to my principal and practically begging him to explain to me how to take my problems and “give them to Jesus.” It sounded wonderful... how do I do it? There was never more than a smiling, “you’ll see one day” answer, and that drove me crazy. I *wanted* to be a *Christian*, to fully live my faith, to walk in a relationship with Jesus, and if that relationship was characterized by an ability to “give up your burdens” to him, then I wanted a guide to doing it. It never came. As I reflected in the group on this statement, I realized that it was something of a critical awakening in me. My frustration at this “easy answer” led to a questioning of what I had received as “truth” regarding many things.

Later, though, I would see this challenging of my beliefs in more ways focused toward the other, and specifically toward justice. As I interacted with others in my seminary, especially those from outside my experience and tradition, I began to critically evaluate personal commitments and long-held beliefs. I wrote, regarding this,

It was also challenging to cultural assumptions. I was exposed to diversity at [seminary] that I’d not experienced before. I sat in class with Presbyterians and Baptists and Catholics who all (at least to my eyes) lived more Christian lives than I did. And so I had to re-think my understandings of “who’s in” and “who’s out.” In one class, a worship class, I sat with a lady who objected to the use of “Father” in the Lord’s Prayer. I reacted strongly to this, in my head, but when she explained that her father had assaulted her and that using that word for God was inappropriate, scales fell from my eyes, in a sense. I saw that life experience colors how we read Scripture, and that some people’s life experiences were quite

different from mine. And I learned in that diverse atmosphere to love people that I completely disagreed with. It was beautiful.

As we discussed this incident, the participants recognized similar events in their own lives in which they experienced a de-centering of the self which had long-lasting consequences: each participant suggested that they now approach difference with far more openness than before the spiritually formative events, thus proving these incidents to be moments of *conscientization* (Freire 1985; cf. Gutiérrez, 1998) in which the participants developed a critical awareness.

Here, both Phoebe's story and my own showed significant spiritual formation through our experiences through one particularly traumatic incident in both. Phoebe's story represents almost a "type" of epistemological shudder as described by Losinsky and Collinson (1999). After decades of marriage, Phoebe's husband came out to her as a gay man who had been suppressing his orientation for years. He left her and their children to pursue an alternative life. She was devastated, and records herself as being furious with God for allowing such a thing to happen to her. Through time and theological reflection and prayer on this event, however, Phoebe has come to recognize the pain which her husband bore for many years and the disconnect between the church's response to those with same-sex orientation and the gospel's call to love one another. She recognized in her husband's life toward others around him the love which the gospel calls for. In the discussion of her spiritual autobiography, Phoebe expressed that

I figured that there's something that we, the church, can do to help these people. I don't know. But there's something. I mean, [Her husband] is a really good guy, I

mean, he has done more to help people, to take care of people, than almost anyone I know. And I figure the rest...

At this point Phoebe interrupted herself with “anyway, I’m going on.” But she went on to exhort the other participants, all much younger, to find ways to engage the church in transformational dialog on this subject. This is evidence of real spiritual formation, of a movement from inertia to advocacy (cf. Jones & Hammersley, 2009, who saw similar phenomena in a course engaged in praxis and reflection).

While the event was different, my own experience of grief in the loss of my wife became a moment of profound spiritual formation for me, as I engaged critically with cherished beliefs of the faith I had. I wrestled with the habits of spirituality, and found myself unable to pray. But I also re-evaluated life-goals and began reflecting on theory and practice and ways in which the two inform one another.

This would be reinforced in the PhD program in education, a field which was new to me and was focused on *application* of theory. The education program provided a challenge to the “ivory tower” mentality that I had developed over my academic career. I recorded a moment of this transformation in my spiritual autobiography:

About half way through the program, one of my favorite professors—a man of limitless energy and abounding in hope, despite the challenges facing him and his community—gently chastised me for my academic bent. I won’t use his exact (and graphic) words, but he basically told me that, if my learning and theorizing never changed the world around me because I didn’t interact with the world around me, my learning was useless and to some extent even I was useless! All I could hear in my head at the time was “you study the Scriptures diligently

because you think in them you have eternal life...” For all of their knowledge about the Scriptures, the Pharisees were missing, completely, the working out of them before their eyes. And so was I. So long as the Bible was “academic,” so long as church history and theology remain in the classroom but not in how I act and treat others and strive for justice and hope, they are not truly Christian.

This passage resonated with the participants, as well, and shed light on some of the problems each participant had during their seminary education. Insofar as their seminaries focused on theoretical knowledge without an integrated curriculum they did not offer students an integrated approach to living from their theory (cf. Farley, 1994; Banks, 1999; Kelsey 1993; Cannell, 2006). Thus participants found their seminaries to be effective at deconstructing beliefs (especially fundamentalist notions of Scripture and “truth”), but almost completely unhelpful in the *construction* of a system of thinking and living in life as Christians. In every case students found models for this integration somewhere beyond the curricular walls of the seminary.

Seminary, then, figured more prominently in this section than in the others, as might be expected. As the contemporary seminary is built in the Cartesian vision of the human as “thinking thing,” it is at the forefront of the challenging of ideas and beliefs (Cannell, 2006). Insofar as seminaries allow for discussions in diverse situations among diverse traditions and people they facilitate a critical “epistemological shudder” for students which allows them to re-evaluate their taken-for-granted worlds (cf. Berger, 1967).

The importance of mentoring into praxis. A final important theme which emerged in the discussion of the spiritual autobiography is the importance that mentoring

into Christian practices played in the spiritual formation of each participant. As participants grew in their faith, they each found mentors who provided examples and encouragement in their spiritual formation. In fact, participants' spiritual autobiographies were structured around largely around important events and people.

Timothy, for instance, wrote of the importance of leaders in the church in which he grew up in developing him spiritually. He wrote that the senior pastor of his church had "taken [Timothy] under his wing" and invited him into ministry in partnership. During our group discussion, this pastor's influence came up again as Timothy spoke of his importance to developing his prayer life and preaching.

Similarly, for John Mark, mentorship played a key role in his spiritual formation. He mentioned his father and mother and their dedication to the church and to service. He also presented the missionary in foreign field teaching him to pray and practice spiritual discipline. In his loving church community John Mark was mentored into a loving-kindness toward others, especially the mistreated and the marginalized. In seminary, John Mark found extra-curricular mentoring from professors and from authors—he wrote of the importance of the *Rule of St. Benedict* in his spiritual formation throughout seminary and even to today.

Phoebe presents a fascinating study in mentoring. It was her husband who taught her to "fall in love" with the God of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Of his influence she wrote

Somehow [in our study together] through my tears and fears, and with [her husband's] patience and our long discussions, I finally could believe that grace, hope, love and forgiveness were available, that I was loved beyond measure by

the God who had created me, and I was his child. It was like the sun had finally broken through...the rain was gone...

In a beautiful twist, Phoebe has been given opportunity to respond to this mentoring of love and patience back to her husband. In our discussion she expressed joy in her pain at the reconciliation (or at least peace) that she and her husband have experienced of late, as he now travels through Alzheimer's disease.

Further, Phoebe's father and mother served as important role models in her spiritual development. Her father's dedicated concern to listen to those with whom he disagreed, and to defend Phoebe even when he disagreed with her, proved to be an example that Phoebe would emulate in her own life.

Her mother's willingness to love selflessly—without benefit—would also prove to be an example as well. Phoebe explained that her father's family did not care for Phoebe's mother (or for Phoebe), which led to a difficult situation when it came to living out Christian love to her. Phoebe wrote that

Trips to visit her were painful. She always looked at my mother as though she wondered who my dad had brought with him. My mother believed we should visit her because it was the right thing to do. My dad simply endured the visits. Within the context of this grandmother, I learned that even though it might not make you happy, you still did the right thing, which meant visits, appropriate gifts, and even letters.

From the experience of her mother's dedication, then, Phoebe learned to care for others regardless of how it made her feel.

Finally, in my own experience, mentoring played a key role. Throughout my spiritual autobiography *people* figure prominently, whether it is my mother and father and their dedication to the church or the minister under whom I began ministry or the professor who wept and prayed with me at my wife's death. In each case, mentors proved to be key components of developing a spiritually formed life.

Lasting Spiritual Formation in the experience of Seminary

Following the development of themes, then, I have engaged in an analysis of the data with respect to the model of lasting change described above (Napier, N.d.) in their relationship to seminary. In each case, it is important to recognize that themes may overlap into different areas of lasting formation. The model of lasting change provides a systematic way of organizing data toward understanding ways in which these themes intersect with transition and spiritual formation in the experience of each of the participants in seminary.

Ideas. Clearly noted in the themes above, the transformation of ideas certainly occurred in seminary. Sometimes, as noted, this was through critical study of theology, church history, and Scripture. Each participant noted that their experience of theological education included “aha” moments that challenged longstanding, unreflective beliefs and practices. This usually was seen in a challenge of a fundamentalist understanding of Scripture, history, and interpretation.

Often, though, the transformation even of ideas was beyond the scope of the curriculum of the seminary. As seen especially in Phoebe's, Stephen's, and my own stories, it was often the collision of beliefs with life experience that provided the “epistemological shudder” which challenged these beliefs. Where seminary (and

theological education in general) played a role in the re-formation of these ideas, it was usually insofar as it offered a “safe space” to explore these questions in an academic (and somewhat dispassionate) context. In doing so it made space for lasting spiritual change, though it must be questioned, from these participants’ experiences, whether it was a primary force in their transformation.

Habits/Practices. In some ways, participants expressed that seminary was helpful to a change in or development of habits and practices. These changes were not often considered helpful, however, and were sometimes seen as harmful. John Mark, for instance, expressed dismay at the loss of “structure” in his spiritual life while attending seminary. He has since rebuilt this structure in full-time ministry, but during his seminary work the disciplined, structured life of faith was difficult (if not impossible to maintain).

Likewise, in my own spiritual autobiography I wrote of a phenomenon in which seminary “killed” the aesthetic, experiential side of me.

Other things happened, though. It’s interesting, and I’d not noticed this until writing this piece, that my poetry stopped about the time I started serious academic study. Somewhere in the midst of the Center and the Institute the poet inside me died. I also found myself struggling to preach. Whereas before I was filled with passion for the transformative power of preaching and the Scriptures, I found myself fixating on critical issues in the text, even to things such as Pauline authorship. The synoptic problem even made it into a sermon or two. And I was struggling to make any kind of meaningful connection between what I was preaching and people’s (even my own) lives. I didn’t struggle that hard, though,

because I rationalized this failing by saying “preaching’s not my calling, I’m going to be a scholar.”

After reading this portion to the group in the initial discussion the response was enlightening. To a person the room agreed with the experience. Each participant felt that their time in critical, rational study without combination of aesthetic or practical concern had led to a distancing of themselves from the holistic spiritual formation of their devotional lives. As Smith (2009) and others have noted, this aesthetic sense and its development through “thick practices” of faith is key in developing the moral imagination and equipping people for lasting spiritual formation which challenges the status quo in the challenging world of the marketplace.

In the experience of these participants, then, seminary did not provide a structured framework to implement the structured practices and habits of lasting change. In some ways it was antithetical to this structure.

Social Integration. While participants found lasting spiritual formation through communities that provided social integration of change, they did not generally find the impetus for this change within the curriculum of the seminary. Again, the contemporary seminary, modeled upon the German University, is largely equipped for engaging *ideas* critically and not for spiritual formation. Participants expressed limited importance to their experiences in seminary on their integration of spiritual formation socially.

Conclusion

Three main themes are central to the spiritual autobiographies of the participants of this study: 1) The importance of community; 2) The importance of the “epistemological shudder”; and 3) The importance of mentoring into praxis. In the case

of each participant's autobiography and in the subsequent discussion of these narratives these themes provided a structuring framework for gathering and interpreting data regarding their lasting spiritual formation. Each of these in turn provide important data points for this study in examining the seminary's role in and pedagogy of spiritual formation. Insofar as participants saw a very limited role played by seminary in their spiritual formation—limited largely to the rational and critical—it is important to ask the question of ways in which the seminary might adjust its curriculum and structured experience to address that need. In the following chapter we turn to address this question.

CHAPTER V

USE OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Conclusions

What we're up against

In the mid-1930s the German Lutheran church found itself in a struggle for survival in the midst of the rise of Nazism in Germany. Much of the German state church became compromised and enthusiastically submitted to the rule of Hitler's National Socialist state. In fact, the state church became a willing accomplice to Hitler's agenda and even went so far as to paint Hitler as a messianic figure, resurrection Germany from its deplorable economic and social decline (cf. Bethge, 2000). Churches flew the swastika of the Reich and wrapped themselves in the ideology of National Socialism. In many ways, this is because the church had become bourgeois: church membership and involvement was a sign of social status rather than a commitment to Christian teachings such as mercy, love, and justice (Bonhoeffer, 2010). In this way, the corrupt German church was, in a sense, a symbol for the final resting place of what Christianity had become in Europe and the West: an empty shell of a once just religion, driven not by the righteous fire of its object of worship on behalf of the poor, but the equivocation and pretense of a world-conformed church (Bonhoeffer, 2010).

There were some, however, who resisted. Dietrich Bonhoeffer stood against both the compromised German state church and the Nazi high command itself. On the night of Hitler's "election," Bonhoeffer took to the radio and warned of the "leader" (Führer) becoming the "misleader" if he allowed the population to make of him an idol (Bonhoeffer, 2010). Bonhoeffer was cut off in mid-sermon, but the sermon resonated and

developed the theme of his resistance throughout Hitler's reign—until Bonhoeffer's death.

Bonhoeffer was instrumental in the formation of the “confessing church” in Germany—a movement of churches which was intent on resisting Nazi ideology. The confessing church was comprised of churches who were willing to sign the Barmen declaration, a document which expressly resisted claims to authority over the church by the Nazi state and rejected the oversight of the compromised state church. The declaration was intended to unify the confessing church in its commitment to living out the gospel of Jesus Christ—and its demands for neighbor love and justice—in resistance to Nazi policies of injustice.

In order to serve in this new context, Bonhoeffer and others realized the importance of establishing centers of theological education, seminaries, capable of spiritually forming pastors for work in the confessing church among the pressures of living counter to the culture prevalent in Germany. At this point, theological education in Germany was thoroughly academic, based on the model of the German research university. It was completely beholden to the interests of the state, and theological education did not include “training,” or equipping for service in the church (including spiritual formation). In fact, Bethge (2000) explained that

Academic theological study and research were seen as constituting an education in themselves. Theological ‘training’ was not considered independently worthwhile, and therefore was often neglected” (pp. 419–420).

In this context, then, Bonhoeffer created a seminary at Finkenwalde with a rigorous curricular and extra-curricular program designed to spiritually form students for service

to the church. The community at Finkenwalde took on the character of the ancient, pre-reformation seminaries (Cannell, 2006). While the academic study of theology retained a prominent place in the curriculum, Bonhoeffer also designed mandatory periods of devotion and service into the daily flow of the seminary, as well as a demanding communal life (Bethge, 2000). All of the seminarians lived in small rooms on the campus of the seminary at Finkenwalde (which was operated in a large estate owned by a German noble) and were required to participate in communal events, including communal and individual confession (Bethge, 2000). As we have seen, above, the design of the seminary at Finkenwalde is in keeping with the earliest models and purposes of theological education, insofar as theology was a spiritual discipline which was meant to shape the heart of believers (Charry, 1997). In many ways, this would be largely unheard of among Protestants, both at the time and today, which became modernist institutions concerned with the passing on of “knowledge” (cf. Cannell, 2006; Bara, 2015).

The seminary at Finkenwalde was too short lived to truly evaluate its success, but its effort at transformation did in fact yield tangible results of spiritual formation among its students, as attested by Bonhoeffer’s student and friend (and later biographer) Eberhard Bethge. Bonhoeffer’s life—and indeed, his death—itself testifies to the *effectiveness* of this exercise of spiritual formation, as he bravely resisted the Nazis to his death, and continually evidenced personal spiritual formation throughout his life (cf. Bonhoeffer, 2010, in which he apologizes to his Jewish brother in law for refusing to perform his wedding out of fear). Ultimately, Bonhoeffer was arrested by the Gestapo and imprisoned in Tegel prison in Berlin, before being transferred to Flossenbergl concentration camp. He was hanged by the Nazis just prior to the camp’s liberation.

It is not my intention, here, to draw direct parallels between Bonhoeffer's historical context and my own. I do not believe that seminaries and churches today face a threat even approaching that of National Socialism in Hitler's Germany. Nevertheless, Bonhoeffer's work at Finkenwalde is at least *analogous* to the kinds of transformation needed among seminaries today. Christendom in Europe is dead. The great cathedrals which once were full now remain largely empty, often symbols of mistrust rather than hope. The institution of Christendom itself—its explicit presence in the governing institutions of European society—has largely faded from European influence (cf. Murray, 2004; Ramachandra 2008). Christendom in the U.S. is dying, though in some places it remains active (e.g. rural, southern areas). The context of seminary education has shifted, significantly, as it had in Bonhoeffer's Germany.

An additional complicating factor for seminaries has arisen in the United States as well. Education has become increasingly commodified and instrumentalized. It has become an industry, driven largely by market concerns and needs rather than the pursuit of human flourishing (cf. Spears & Loomis, 2009). The darker side of capitalism, with its emphasis on humans as essentially consumers, largely took root in American society, and education became rooted in credentialism in order to provide fodder for the economic machine (Spears & Loomis, 2009). Society became convinced that credentials were the equivalent of skills, and credentials then became vital to successfully pursuing the life of a consumer. Freire (1998) argued, more caustically, that the education industry became (or had always been) an instrument designed to maintain the status quo of rich and poor, in that it served only to deliver the “received knowledge” that the bourgeois intended for

the lower classes. This included just enough “knowledge” (as defined by the bourgeois) to keep workers in their place.

Spears & Loomis (2009), though not as committed to Freire’s (1998) critical hermeneutic, recognize this danger in American education as well. They cite a recent California social science standard that encourages teachers to discuss students’ work in school as it relates to their “personal human capital” (Spears & Loomis, 2009). All of this leads to two problems: the view that education is a commodity, to be sold; and the view that education is a transaction: the student pays (works) and receives knowledge for their fees. Both Freire and Spears & Loomis touch on the heart of the problem in education in the U.S. today.

Seminary education has resisted, to some extent, the broader trends in education in the U.S. The seminary, grounded as it is in a much more ancient theory of education and human life, has attempted to maintain much of the older understanding of education. However, the tide toward viewing education as a commodity has been difficult to resist. For the last sixty years, or so, seminaries have found themselves having to justify centuries-old practices to students and board members interested in human capital (cf. Banks, 1999; Farley, 1994; Kelsey, 1993; Cannell, 2006).

This pressure toward compromise leads to additional problems for seminaries not faced by other institutions. In some ways, the ancient system of education lends itself to a more authoritarian view of knowledge. This, combined with the capitalistic commitment to the importance of passing on “skills” to workers so that they may function effectively as cogs in the economic machine, has moved seminary education away from its historical commitment to producing students who are able to practice the Christian faith in their

own contexts toward an authoritarian system of passing on scientific facts and “knowledge” (cf. Shaw, 2014). In many cases, evangelical seminary education has become a means of content-transfer rather than transformation (Nichols & Dewerse, 2010) in order to serve the business interests of the American mega-churches.

In considering what a seminary in the contemporary United States should do to address these problems, it is essential to turn again and consider the essential purpose and function of a seminary in general. Seminaries exist, solely, for the education of those who have been called to serve the church in professional and lay roles. As such, the primary function of seminary education should be spiritual formation. Seminary education should be concerned with moving students toward a recognition of places in which they may serve as Christ, especially to those who have been marginalized by systems of injustice present in society. In this sense, students should experience something like the “transformational learning” described by Mezirow (1991) in which a traumatic challenge to their dominant worldview is presented and allows for critical reflection and change in action.

Insofar as the seminary in the U.S. is a modernist institution built to thrive and survive in the context of Christendom (cf. Cannell, 2010), it is unequipped to serve in the contemporary, post-modern, post-Christendom context in which the church now lives and breathes. If the seminary is to improve its educational capabilities, it would do well to consider Bonhoeffer’s example. It must envision a diverse environment in which students from all different backgrounds and creeds engage one another’s experiences and contexts and learn from them. Additionally, it must become a place in which students are challenged to engage with the community around them through acts of service and a

dedicated and disciplined prayer life. These times of service would challenge student assumptions and allow them to pursue a deeper understanding of theology within the contexts of everyday life around them.

The seminary should become a place of transformed pedagogy, in which, as Freire (1998) suggests, the teacher-is-the-student. Faculties must re-imagine what education is, and they must begin to allow students to explore the concepts of theology within their own contexts. In this way, knowledge that is truly transformative may be constructed and practiced within seminaries. While new knowledge will be created, it will remain connected to the ancient knowledge of the church, and in many ways it will allow for a reconnection with the roots of the church which thrived in the poor, marginalized communities of the Roman Empire.

Findings of this study as points for seminary improvement

The data in the participants' spiritual autobiographies in this study has suggested a few ways in which seminaries might improve their capability to provide a space of spiritual formation for students. Three particular aspects proved to be most formative for the participants. Here I explore ways in which contemporary seminaries may address these aspects in a time of transition. If Protestant (particularly free-church Evangelical) seminaries are to adjust to the realities of 21st century North America, it is vital to "Reenvision" seminary (Banks, 1999) as an institution in such a way that provides space for experience in learning alongside reason. Students must *encounter* the gospel in seminary—in the various spiritually formative ways discussed by participants of this study—in order to be truly spiritually formed.

I turn now to consider two major areas in which changes must be considered in order for contemporary seminaries to fulfill this role. I will follow this with the suggestion of an integrated pedagogy which allows for interplay of the themes found in the data. Finally I will conclude with a discussion of the limitations of this study and areas requiring further research. It is my prayer that this study might provide insight to seminary faculty and administrators, as well as students, as they engage in a reimagining of what seminary might be. I turn now to the areas of change.

Areas of Seminary Education that Must Change

Cultural Changes

In considering areas in which seminaries must reimagine themselves, it is perhaps of utmost importance to consider changes in the *culture* of seminaries. By culture, I intend a holistic understanding of the institution's values, beliefs, practices, and way of life. A culture forms the thinking of those who belong to it; it provides the furrows along which thought and value and creativity move. Thus culture is vital for considering what an institution values and ways in which it determines, for instance, what is "good" and "bad," or of higher and lower value.

The seminary's culture is still formed, largely, from the academic values and worldview of the German University which was exported to the United States in the 19th century (Cannell, 2010). Academic performance is often considered the pinnacle of achievement, and assessments continue to function as a measure of academic ability (defined along the lines of university standards). As Timothy pointed out during discussion of the spiritual autobiographies,

There was kind of an... well, an unspoken or unwritten rule of thumb about the people I was in school with. We just kind of assumed that the smart people⁷ should go on to further graduate work and become professors. People who weren't as intelligent should go into ministry.

Timothy's fellow participants also suggested similar experiences. I followed up regarding whether this was explicitly spoken by professors or others in the seminary, and the participants explained that it was never explicitly mentioned or even implicitly spoken. It was intuited from institutional commitments. It became clear, then, that this is a cultural problem among seminaries, which have adopted the epistemology and commitments of the German university regarding reason, intellect, and character formation (cf. Cannell, 2006; also Bara, 2015). Students are encouraged through both the hidden and null curriculums (Shaw, 2014) as well as institutional life and values to understand that excellence is defined within the seminary by academic performance. Several of the participants in this study came away with the understanding that "smarter" is better, and thus there was a tendency to equate the ability to perform within the academic structures of the seminary with spiritual and ministerial formation. While John Mark and Phoebe did not feel the pull to further graduate work as a means to excellence, they both recognized this tendency as a major part of the seminary's culture. As John Mark suggested, "There was a part of seminary, unspoken, that was about competition, I think. Not with everyone, and certainly it wasn't spoken about openly, but most of us understood it to be so."

⁷ I asked Timothy to clarify what he intended by "smart" here. He responded, "The people who did well academically."

This, then, is how I am employing the word culture: it is the unspoken but undeniable undercurrent of values, practices, structures, languages and the like that govern the life of a people or institution. A change in culture requires both revelation and intention. It is difficult to recognize one's cultural home, and thus it requires a "making the familiar strange" in order to see and understand its impact (cf. Smith, 2009). Once one recognizes cultural forces at work within their institution, it requires significant intentionality to change—it requires a change in daily habits and the development of "thick practices" that form members of the institution in different and powerful, lasting ways (Smith, 2009). Seminary cultures must change in order to reimagine theological education in the contemporary U.S. I will now suggest some changes within the three themes which emerged from the data above that may assist the seminary in equipping students for spiritual formation.

Community. As community proved to be perhaps the most prominent theme among the participants in this study, we begin with a discussion of ways in which the seminary might change its culture to address the development and transformation of community. Participants revealed that community provided a safe space, a haven, for them as they engaged in their spiritual formation. It formed a vital part of their lasting change, especially in terms of their social integration of their "becoming" selves.

Seminaries, then, should consider ways in which their cultures help or hinder the development of community for students and faculty. Administrators and faculty must consider ways in which they can develop intentional practices which develop community. These include building on existing structures of diversity and the natural strength of academic openness toward dissenting opinions and beliefs. In some ways, the seminaries

(and places of theological education) experienced by the participants already, in fact, offer much in terms of the development of community when it comes to engaging diverse views. Stephen mentioned in his spiritual autobiography the importance of engaging differing interpretations and perspectives in his seminary experience, and my own autobiography includes a central event in which community in diversity played a key role in my spiritual formation.

Development of a spiritually formative community, however, requires more than a commitment to diversity and the development of a safe space. In fact seminaries will have to intentionally create a culture that develops the rhythms of habits and practices of spiritual formation in community in order to develop the kind of community necessary for spiritual formation. Smith (2009) argues for the “thick practices” of the church’s liturgy as vital for Christian education which intends to direct the desire/love of Christians toward that which is truly loveable—justice as found within the loving community of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Through these thick practices, churches and seminaries will develop cultures that are able to resist the broader (and corrupting) capitalist/consumer culture of the contemporary U.S. (Smith, 2009).

Seminaries must develop a daily rhythm of communal devotion, similar to the daily offices of the Roman Catholic monastic orders, in order to facilitate the transformative community necessary to spiritually form students. Bonhoeffer’s work at Finkenwalde was criticized heavily by German Lutherans for being “Catholic,” but it was living into the daily habits of the monastic tradition that led to the greatest amount of community development among the seminarians under his tutelage (Bethge, 2000). Similarly, contemporary seminaries should consider ways in which they might

incorporate the daily offices—with their disruption of the mundane work of the day—into their community life, so that they place the development of community under the constant flow of the story of God (cf. Smith, 2009; also especially Chittister, 1992).

Developing the seminary as a liturgical culture will provide a space and spiritual *force* in the development of a spiritually transformative community which can stand as an alternative to the consumerist, divisively polarized community found in late-modernity and post-modernity in the U.S. It is vital that seminarians are invited into this community. As I write, one of the major parties is in the process of nominating perhaps the most divisive candidate for President in the history of politics in the U.S. He is coarse and vulgar, and many of his outspoken policy ideas stand as antithetical to the gospel's call for Christian neighbor-love and the pursuit of justice. Yet much (a majority?) of this candidate's overwhelming support is coming from self-identified Evangelical Christians. It becomes all the more vital, then, that seminaries—institutions whose existence is for the purpose of forming ministers for the church—develop Christ-shaped communities that in turn shape students into the image of the loving Christ.

“Epistemological shudders.” A second formative factor within the spiritual formation of participants was what I have called, following Losinsky and Collinson (1999, as cited in Leafgren's wonderful study, 2011), “epistemological shudders.” These are moments in which unexamined commitments—ideas and beliefs—are challenged so deeply that they are either re-shaped or jettisoned. Sometimes this challenge is in the form of ideas, as may be seen, for instance, in the challenging of various forms of fundamentalist understandings of scripture and sectarianism by higher criticism. More often, though, epistemological shudders occurred in participants' lives through

experience, sometimes through tragedy, as in Stephen's loss of a good friend during high school, and sometimes through encounter with someone who had been considered "wrong" or outside of the confines of acceptable within the participants' worldview.

In some ways, this is where the currently configured culture of seminary performs well already. The academic study of theology often provides epistemological shudders in its critical engagement with history and the text of Scripture, as well as its study of various heterodoxies and heresies. These provide a natural place in which students are facilitated into ideas which challenge long-held and unexamined commitments, values, and beliefs. This was illustrated, for instance, in my spiritual autobiography in the following paragraph,

I was also thoroughly loving school. At [seminary] I learned in practice the meaning of "faith seeking understanding," as we studied and learned about things that challenged the fundamentalism I had learned in high school. Tensions in the text I'd not seen or rationalized away were taken seriously and yet the authority and power of Scripture was not denied. I found so much joy in those years in study, in tearing down long-held rigidity. So many things I'd believed were disrupted, and while it was disorienting, it was utterly liberating. It was like discovering God for the first time.

Further, insofar as seminaries are places of diversity and diverse communities, they provide settings for epistemological shudders as students encounter others from diverse traditions and backgrounds. These challenges to cognitive processes provide a more nuanced and open thinking among students and faculty as they engage others with whom they differ. This was most evident in my own spiritual autobiography, in the

incident in which I encountered someone with whom I differed regarding feminist reading of scripture and my own preconceptions and prejudices.

It was also challenging to cultural assumptions. I was exposed to diversity at [seminary] that I'd not experienced before. I sat in class with Presbyterians and Baptists and Catholics who all (at least to my eyes) lived more Christian lives than I did. And so I had to re-think my understandings of "who's in" and "who's out." In one class, a worship class, I sat with a lady who objected to the use of "Father" in the Lord's Prayer. I reacted strongly to this, in my head, but when she explained that her father had assaulted her and that using that word for God was inappropriate, scales fell from my eyes, in a sense. I saw that life experience colors how we read Scripture, and that some people's life experiences were quite different from mine. And I learned in that diverse atmosphere to love people that I completely disagreed with. It was beautiful.

Seminaries must build on this already existing culture. A significant possibility exists for further developing this culture within collaborative learning (more discussion below), in which the faculty invite students into *gentle* dialogical research together of various tensions that exist in the classroom. Here, postmodern theory provides a possibility of students and faculty, together, examining the *discourses* surrounding the "real" in order to evaluate ways in which students and faculty have been formed toward preconceptions which should be challenged (cf. Charteris, 2014).⁸ Inviting students into

⁸ Charteris, drawing on Lather's (1986) work, uses "catalytic validity" to establish her research as valid. She is cited here by analogy rather than direct application. "Catalytic validity" suggests that participants who engage in joint research with the primary researcher experience a reorientation of "reality." By analogy, students who

the research process empowers them to act as agents, but it also enhances the likelihood of epistemological shudders and “productive aporia.”

In addition, faculty (in particular) should cultivate an atmosphere within their classrooms and beyond that encourage and gently facilitate these epistemological shudders. The participants in this study all expressed to varying degrees periods of “disorientation” in their theological studies resulting from exposure to ideas and experiences that greatly challenged preconceptions. They experienced mixed results from seminary faculty and environments in terms of feeling comfortable in explore these disorientations. Faculty should develop a sense of transparency in their own research and should provide students evidence of their own epistemological shudders in order to develop a culture of transformation.

One example of providing a space which is gently supportive of the epistemological shudder is a course taught at my institution by a colleague who spent several years in mission work. Upon beginning his work with our seminary, he was tasked with teaching a “world religions” course which had been in existence for some time and basically functioned as an informational, “encyclopedia” course about religions outside Christianity. Upon receiving responsibility for the course—which is a required course—the professor changed the name of the course to “Christian encounters with other cultures” and proceeded to develop the course. During development, he recognized that any discussion of a religion outside his Christian tradition would necessarily be encyclopedic—and thus truncated and generalized. He recognized the necessity of bringing in representatives of each religion to lead discussions of them. Further, he

engage in joint research with professors are also invited into recognizing tension as agents and evaluating and reorienting their view of “reality.”

understood the importance of *experience* in learning, and thus he began taking the class to join non-Christians in their worship services (e.g. Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist, etc.) where possible and permissible. Students have expressed universal appreciation for the course, and many (if not most) express the experience of what I would consider an “epistemological shudder” as their fundamental preconceptions about these other religions and their adherents are expressly challenged via experience. These kinds of courses should be encouraged, and the institutional culture of the seminary should be intentionally shifted toward these kinds of experiences.

Insofar as challenging unexamined assumptions that are held as unquestionable is vital for spiritual formation, it is important that seminaries continually evaluate ways in which they may assimilate these moments. Conforming to the Enlightenment, positivistic culture of the modern university is in some ways antithetical to the challenge of re-evaluating unexamined assumptions—for once “knowledge” (and what is considered to be “knowledge”!) has been established it becomes virtually impossible to question such knowledge. It is vital that seminaries work to build a culture of openness to challenge the status quo in biblical interpretation, theological/doctrinal commitments, and sociological/anthropological understandings.

Mentoring. For more than a century, teaching—whether in university or in grade school—has been understood as a “top-down” endeavor, largely consisting of the passing on of knowledge from teacher to student. This has served, as Freire (1998) pointed out on many occasions, to bolster the status quo through the “banking method” of education. While seminary education is not designed strictly to produce workers for the economic system, it has also embraced the banking model of education, and the teacher has more

often been understood as “master” rather than “mentor.” Professors in seminaries have been generally concerned with the passing on of “knowledge” to students, with mentoring toward living Christian lives of grace, justice, and *charitas* being a distant or non-existent project.

Participants in this study reveal, throughout their lives, the importance of living examples of faith. If seminaries are to engage in the task of providing spiritual formation for their students, they must begin to incorporate mentoring into their formal and informal curricula. This is made difficult in the midst of a system of education that has separated out theory from practice (Cannell, 2006). As seminaries enter into post-Christendom, however, leadership must begin the process of tearing down the divide between the two and inviting students into the lives of faculty and administration as they live out their Christian commitments.

In order to develop a culture that values mentoring, seminaries need to consider ways of assessing faculty performance beyond the traditional “publish or perish” model. Shaw (2014) has argued—effectively—that faculty evaluation for promotion should also include the number of hours spent with students outside the classroom and the amount of community service and ministry performed. Assessment provides the most tangible picture of what an institution considers to be important and thus forms a key factor in the development of the institution’s culture (cf. Shagrir, 2015).

In addition, professors must come to understand the importance of relational knowledge with students. This dynamic is already taking place in many areas of higher education, specifically among education faculty (see e.g. Shagrir, 2015; Ash & Schreiner, 2016). In many ways, though, seminaries continue to operate in the model of the German

university in terms of relationship between student and professor. The entire model of education, the culture, suggests that professors and students should not be in relationship beyond the classroom as it might give rise to partiality or conflict of interest (cf. Banks, 1999). This culture must change. As Banks (1999) explained,

It is through the sharing of a person's life as well as their beliefs that life-giving change comes to others. Truth must be embodied as well as articulated, incarnated as well as revealed. Doing this sometimes drains the life out of the one who is sharing with others, but it is precisely this that brings the greatest life to them (p. 172).

Christianity is, at base, an apprenticeship. Jesus' call to his disciples is not to develop true doctrine or to be right or even to be good, but to "follow." As we have seen above, theological education and ministerial training prior to the Enlightenment was a culture of apprenticeship in which mentors *lived* the content of education in the presence of apprentices.

Cultural change: conclusion. Systemic change is difficult, and here I have discussed only a very short intimation of changes which are important to the transformation of the seminary's culture. I do not intend to offer a programmatic outline of step-by-step procedures to address the necessary changes. Rather these suggestions are more conversation starters for fellow students of seminary improvement to consider. It is my prayer that our "play" with the concepts of seminary change might bring about a renewal of the institution as a whole. Clearly, though, the culture of seminaries, bound as it has been to modernity, Enlightenment beliefs regarding knowledge and education, and

the model of the German university, must be changed and that change must take place from the inside out.

The three themes discussed herein (and below) are of course interconnected and have overlap with one another, and with the themes discussed below. It is important to recognize, for instance, that a change to institutional culture with regard to the intentional development of community will necessarily impact the institution's culture of mentor/apprenticeship, as faculty members (and administrative staff) intentionally work to build community and develop relationship with students. Each of these should be carefully considered moving forward and offer significant opportunities for further research.

I move now to consider a second change that must be made in connection to the three themes. Again, I must stress the interconnectedness between these changes and the three themes drawn out from the participants' spiritual autobiographies. Insofar as seminary education (and education in general) is a holistic endeavor, one would do well to imagine the seminary as an ecosystem and thus to engage in transformation in one area is to engage in transformation of the system itself.

Pedagogical changes

In addition to cultural changes, the seminary will have to engage in changes to the way it teaches. In a system of education as ancient as theological studies it is difficult to interact with and employ novel systems of pedagogy over against time-worn means of instruction. As I have argued above, though, theological pedagogy as currently configured is a relatively novel development. If seminaries are to improve their ability to

facilitate students' spiritual formation they must look both to the past and to the more novel developments in pedagogical theory.

Seminaries are still largely employing a teacher-centered learning environment. In this way, the "sage on the stage" imparts "knowledge" to the student from on high. In many ways, this is not a terrible strategy: scholars have generally spent a lifetime of study within their respective disciplines and are certainly more versed in the knowledge of their guild. However, many have noted the need for the creation of a "student-centered" classroom which is dedicated toward teaching the student critical thinking (cf. Sarason, 2004). Seminaries must begin to recognize the possibilities made available to students when the classroom is re-envisioned with questions, rather than statements, in mind. How can courses be designed in such a way as to awaken a student's critical thinking? How can course design and instruction stir a student to challenge long held but unexamined commitments and beliefs? How can pedagogy be employed that will enable students to imagine ways in which the theories of theology might be made alive in their own ministries? As Sarason (2004, p. 87) suggested: how can professors facilitate student realization of the false dichotomy between "practical" and the theoretical? These are questions that must be addressed if seminaries are to become institutions of learning rather than institutions of "received" knowledge. How can seminaries develop a pedagogy which impacts the major themes developed in the participants' spiritual autobiographies? It is to this question that I now turn.

Community. Transformation in the seminary starts with transformation of the faculty, and, as Banks (1999) has expressed, this is a delicate and difficult task. Quoting Cornell West (1988), Banks (1999) argued that

if change is going to take place: “the best place to start is with the most delicate and difficult: *the self-images and self-identities of seminary professors*.” We can broaden this to include those teaching in other kinds of theological institutions. It is a delicate and difficult area, for we have such a large personal investment in our professional images and identity. Sometimes these are simply a function of what we do, so that our vocational understanding determines our self-understanding. Criticism of the one is regarded as criticism of the other. Calls for change in one are interpreted as calls for change in the other. This is often too threatening (pp. 169-170).

A pedagogy that develops and engages community, though, is vital to facilitating spiritual formation. It is a pedagogy that will last. As Banks (1999) expressed,

Unless animated by, and visibly expressing, the faith, love, and hope that make our efforts effective, we do not achieve much in the classroom that endures. There may be much sound and fury of ideas there, and when students go out into churches or other places of ministry, they may do so full of strong views and great plans, but this too will not amount to much (p. 170).

Perhaps the primary obstacle to a pedagogy that embraces student input in knowledge creation and thus facilitates true community, then, is the very human tendency of professors to protect their own privileged place as “knowers.” In short, the primary obstacle to a pedagogy which develops and fosters community—a place for students to be involved beyond mere receptacles of “knowledge”—is that most ancient sin: pride. Drawing from West (1988), Banks (1999) continues on to explain that

The key element here is the fullest reveling in the life of the mind and putting this at the disposal of the people of God. For [West], the chief obstacles to this are the self-seeking careerism and self-excusing cynicism that are so endemic to the academy, or the myopic preoccupation with numbers and influence that is so widespread in the church. If, as teachers, we are to fully serve the concerns of the kingdom of God, then we must be prepared to live on the margins of both these institutions. Great teachers, [West] says, have always operated this way, and this is why they continue to exert influence today. If a larger number of present-day faculty would follow in their footsteps we would begin to see the “full-scale reform” in theological education (p. 170).

Clearly, then, there is much overlap between this discussion and that of “culture” above, for faculty must be encouraged to reject the banking model of education and embrace a more democratic pedagogy. This is a key to developing a pedagogy of community. A pedagogy that fosters community invites students into the knowledge-making process and shuns the elitism denounced by Banks above. It embraces Jesus’ method of teaching and learning, inviting all to come to the conversation and engage in a dialogical exploration of truth.

This way of teaching (and learning) engages students in the lifelong process of education as described by Timothy and John Mark: from the beginning of their experience of spiritual formation they were invited into the conversation by the community of faith in service to the church. It is also true of Phoebe, who learned through her *exclusion* from formal service in the church the importance of being invited into the communal learning. Seminaries must develop a pedagogy that develops

community through inclusion, through a democratic process that does not centralize knowledge in the mind of the “sage on the stage” but encourages continual “becoming” through the community’s engagement with ideas and knowledges.

“Epistemological shudders.” As with the previous discussion, the seminary is already well equipped to facilitate epistemological shudders as it encourages students to engage with higher criticism and academic study of theology. As the participants expressed the importance of these experiences to the transformation of their ideas, it is vital that faculty consider ways they might continue to facilitate these moments, especially in ways they have not considered before.

Critical pedagogy, such as that offered by McLaren (2015), may provide insight for faculty members here. McLaren’s work offers several important critiques of contemporary Christian practices and interpretations. Perhaps most important for facilitating epistemological shudders is McLaren’s (2015) critique of contemporary interpretations of scripture that suggest compatibility with neo-liberalism and capitalism specifically (pp. 104ff) and his argument that Christians are not given the option but rather the responsibility to struggle on behalf of the poor (p. 106). It is important to tread carefully on these matters, however. Deconstruction of prejudices and preconceptions is always difficult. In matters most central to a human’s conception of existence, of right and wrong, of truth and error—and there is no area of thought more central to these deeply held convictions than religious thought—can be deeply disorienting and disturbing. If the goal is “speaking the truth in love,” then, faculty should tread lightly when addressing these issues.

In addition, a pedagogy of pure critique must not be employed. Deconstructing,⁹ in many ways, is a simple process of critique and illumination—of pointing out ways in which students (and faculty!) are engaged in systems of prejudice and, often, oppression (cf. Freire, 1998). Providing a *constructive* pedagogy in the face of the epistemological shudder is difficult but absolutely vital to lasting change in ideas and thus spiritual formation. Students must be facilitated in an exploration of constructive responses to tensions and problems that arise from their experiences which shatter prejudices. Only in this way will epistemological shudders prove useful in spiritual formation, as participants' stories suggest. In my own story, for example, I write that theological studies provided a context for me to engage in reflection on the event that caused the greatest epistemological shudder. It was the same for Phoebe, who found in the lived curriculum of the church around her a constructive pedagogy of love and hope during her darkest hours.

A straightforward way to address a transformation of pedagogy in seminaries would be to reimagine assessment. The current standard assessment is of course the research paper, which is problematic for offering a holistic assessment of acquisition and implementation of spiritual/theological knowledge. Faculty should consider ways to assess students differently, whether it is a reflective piece on ways in which the theological subject they are studying provides insight into living the Christian life or actually engaging in some kind of ministry based on their theological study (Shaw,

⁹ It is vital to note that I have in mind here a process of illuminating prejudices of thinking and social commitments rather than the more technical meaning of the term found in, for instance, Derrida.

2014). I have suggested elsewhere,¹⁰ for instance, an integrated curriculum in which students study a particular subject/text one week and then engage in a project which incarnates that subject/text the next. Students would then engage in a critical reflection on the integration of text and life the following week. Each of these exercises would provide a different way of assessing students' progress beyond their ability *strictly* to think rationally and critically; it would assess their ability to incorporate these concepts into their lived lives and provide them a more experiential engagement with theology (Banks, 1999). It would provide opportunities for *real* transformation such as John Mark described when discussing his time in the mission field: a true challenge to preconceptions and prejudices.

Mentoring. Finally, seminaries must envision a pedagogy that provides mentoring to students. Theological studies can lend itself to a hard and fast dichotomy between theory and practice, and a pedagogy that includes mentoring offers an alternative to the purely theoretical model of education. As currently configured, of course, faculty would have an easier time apprenticing students into professorships than into ministry, but developing a pedagogy of spiritual formation would require the faculty to engage in spiritually formative work (ministry) *with* the students.

In many cases, this is already happening, as professors often pray and worship with students (as recorded in the spiritual autobiographies in this study). It must be developed further, however, as faculty consider ways in which they might invite students into the life of faith as mentors.

¹⁰ <http://info.austingrad.edu/christianstudies/to-do-is-to-learn-christian-education-and-spiritual-formation>

There are many areas in which this might be pursued, of course, and there is not enough space herein to discuss them all. I will suggest here, however, at least one area that might be improved by faculty mentoring. As mentioned before, since Schleiermacher, theological studies have been separated into four separate “silos,” including biblical studies, historical studies, theological studies, and practical theology. This divided curriculum is difficult for students to navigate holistically because faculty generally have a divided view of the discipline. Faculty could mentor students into an integrative theology by co-teaching courses. This interdisciplinary work would prove fruitful not just for students, but for faculty as well, as they would be forced to engage the material from areas beyond their normal expertise.

Again, the problem is complex and this is only one solution, but the participants in this study all evidenced the centrality of mentoring in their spiritual formation. If seminaries are to offer relevant training and spiritual formation to their students, they must develop and integrate a mentoring pedagogy into their curriculum.

Spiritual direction, as practiced in Roman Catholic (and perhaps especially in Ignatian) communities, offers possibilities here as well. There are contemporary developments of spiritual direction present within Protestant communities that offer possibilities for seminaries, as well (cf. Mountain, 2014). Mountain’s (2014) definition appropriately captures the essence of what I am suggesting here:

An intentional one-with-another relationship whereby one person (the director), by careful and prayerful listening over a period of time, helps another (the directee) to pay attention to and discern the actions of the Holy Spirit in his or her

walk with God, so that the directee's relationship with God might grow and deepen in obedience and loving intimacy (p. 49).

In Ignatian spirituality, this relationship is built around the spiritual exercises, which were intended to offer “a way of examining one's conscience, of meditating, praying, and contemplating, all in order to get rid of ‘disordered affections’ before God” (Houston, 2008, p. 92). As the director and directee engage in the exercises and in prayer together, their interplay leads toward holiness. Such a relationship between faculty and students would provide context for spiritual formation in seminaries. As noted above, though, Protestantism—especially Luther and his spiritual descendants—largely rejected (or neglected) any doctrine of sanctification, focusing instead on questions of justification (cf. Willard, 1998; Houston, 2008). Therefore, both theological and practical training will be necessary for the development of this relationship between students and faculty and staff. Happily, Protestants are not left alone in this endeavor and may draw on the vast experience of Roman Catholic thought and practice regarding spiritual direction.

Another possibility already in use—but worth further development—is the Supervised Practice of Ministry (SPM) model. SPM has been in use in seminaries for some time, but has been largely hierarchical and technical, rather than (in many ways) conducive toward growth in spiritually formative praxis (Paterson & Rose, 2014). Integrating pedagogical theory from Freire (1998) and others, regarding especially the importance of reflection and praxis, would provide valuable developments to SPM insofar as it invited both faculty and students into the educative process. SPM would thus allow for a *practical* pedagogy in which students integrated theory and practice through fieldwork and reflection (cf. Goleman, 2007).

Pedagogical changes: conclusion. Seminaries will have to engage in a transformation of their pedagogical strategies if they are to offer lasting spiritually formative programs to seminary students. None of the suggestions above, again, offer a programmatic method for transforming seminary education. Each area of the seminary's curriculum will have to be changed, however, if students and faculty are to experience spiritual formation.

Limitations of the Study

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative inquiry is not concerned and therefore does not seek after generalizability. This study recognizes that behind every number in a quantitative study is an individual who is irreducible and organic, and thus I am not attempting to produce a study that is immediately generalizable to every seminary or seminarian. Rather, as I have suggested earlier, qualitative research avoids the reduction of its participants by exploring fully their lived experiences *as they interpret and present them*. I do not doubt that, were the study done with a different research question or different researcher, the presentation might be quite different. This is due to the “multi-valence” of any lived experience and the beauty of co-construction. This is the primary strength of qualitative research, insofar as it captures the interpretive and experienced lived-lives of the participants and avoids reducing them to statistical generalization. Thus, the study is not *limited* by qualitative methodology, unless it is used for generalizability.

The study is limited, however, insofar as the participants of the study are all from free church, Evangelical traditions. It is possible that seminarians from a mainline Protestant tradition would have a different experience; and I am most certain that Roman Catholic seminarians would have a different experience. The participants do represent

different traditions, however, and two of the participants attended mainline Protestant seminaries. Nevertheless, I embrace the contextualization of this research insofar as it grants insight into the experience of spiritual formation of *these participants*, and invites the reader to find similarities in their own experiences.

Further Research

A project like this is pretentious. It remains incomplete, it is fundamentally a lifelong study of human transformation, a subject about which many thousands of volumes have been written over many thousands of years. Further, it is the argument of this study that each of the participants—including me, of course—are “becoming” and are thus only mid-stream in their spiritual formation (cf. Freire, 1984a). Further, seminaries themselves are in a period of transition, and over the last several years many seminaries have adopted different models attempting to provide the kind of spiritually formative environment which is so desperately needed (cf. especially Banks, 1999; and more recently Shaw, 2014).

I would suggest, then, that studies be performed of the seminary graduates from seminaries that have adopted wholly other forms of engaging in education, such as Shaw’s (2014) Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Beirut. Seminary education in non-Western settings, insofar as they may be found and investigated, would also provide insight into differing theories and practices of theological education.

As accreditation and the bureaucracy associated with it are extremely influential on higher education (and therefore seminary) and its culture and pedagogy—especially through institutional self-assessment, etc.—it seems that a study of non-accredited ministerial training schools and their graduates would offer interesting insight into the

effects of standardization in higher education on seminaries. I would suggest that parachurch training organizations should be studied for improvements that may be gleaned and applied to seminaries, as well.

Toward an Integrated, Spiritually Formative Pedagogy

Seminary education must change. It is an easy, yet bold claim. Seminaries have trained ministers for the church for millennia. I have argued herein that the way seminaries have trained ministers has changed radically since the Enlightenment, however, and that the seminary following the German university is obsolete for a post-modern and post-Christendom world. The seminary of the last century was a product of modernity, freighted with the baggage of Enlightenment convictions regarding knowledge and anthropology, and thus the methods and structure of the seminary are reflective of a different cultural moment than that within which we currently live.

This study has suggested that seminaries have played a limited role among the important factors in the spiritual formation of the participants. The participants' spiritual autobiographies revealed that three major, recurrent themes are vital to spiritual formation. These include a strong community which provides a place of belonging and inclusion within which they may practice and experience the practice of Christianity. A second key theme is what I have termed, borrowing from Losinsky and Collinson (1999, as cited in Giugni, 2006), "epistemological shudders," in which the participants experienced something that deeply challenged a prejudice or preconception. Finally, the participants in this study revealed the importance of mentoring in their spiritual formation. That is, they had within their lives persons who incarnated the gospel, who were the living manifestation of the love of God in the flesh.

I began this work with a discussion of what factors were formative to the people of the little French village of Le Chambon sur lignon in their non-violent resistance against the Nazi's systematic oppression of and attempts to destroy European Jewry. I asked the question, raised by Hallie (1979), of what formed these people in such a way that resistance to injustice came naturally, even at the risk of life and health. This study suggests that the spiritually formed life—formed in community and in the challenging of held assumptions and through witnessing the lived lives of other Christians—is the life that “naturally” seeks justice in the face of great injustice. Spiritual formation, I have argued, is key to the life of faith which is lived out in the face of a culture of injustice. It is vital, then, that seminaries develop a means to engage students in the lifelong project of spiritual formation.

Having argued this, I offer a final exhortation to faculty and administrators of seminaries. Descartes famous dictum, *cogito, ergo sum*, “I think, therefore I am,” has defined the Western conception of anthropology for 400 years. But this is a truncated view of humankind that reduces us to purely rational animals and consigns us to a purely skeptical/critical epistemology. We must return to a more holistic understanding of the human being and adjust our institutions of learning accordingly. The act of praying is a spiritual discipline, but it is also a metaphor for a spiritually devoted life. “Pray without ceasing,” says the Apostle Paul (1 Thess 5:17). Insofar as we are praying animals, we are spiritual animals. Let us then embrace a new anthropology, *Oro, ergo sum*, “I pray, therefore I am.”

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