

THE · NEW · SCHOOL · OF · THEOLOGY

(Proposal for a Graduate Theological Institute)

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Source: <http://www.fredputnam.org/?q=node/54>

Summary

THIS PAPER PROPOSES the creation of a unique graduate school that will prepare Christians to minister and to live in light of their faith by becoming thoughtful, reflective men and women. Its curriculum and pedagogy reflect the conviction that fundamental to good ministry and leadership is the ability to listen to and understand three voices: (1) the voice of the author in whatever text is at hand, especially the text of Scripture; (2) voices that express the opinions, fears, hopes, and concerns of others, and the ideas of their culture; and (3) the voice of their own hearts.

The program has three primary aspects, any one of which would make this program unique: (1) all courses are *required/prescribed* conversational *seminars* without testing, grades, or lectures (lectures are public supplements to the overall curriculum); (2) all class texts are *primary texts*, not textbooks (except in Hebrew I, Greek I, and Music I); (3) *music* is integral to the program.^[1]

The goal of this program is to foster an ongoing conversation, an intellectual and spiritual community of maturing learners—in other words, a place where students and faculty together read, think, converse, and thus learn to live and minister by pondering the most important ideas—the permanent ideas—as they are found in the great texts of the Western world.

DETAILS & DISTINCTIVES

Degree Offered: Master of Theology (Th.M.)

or Master of Arts (M.A.) with a concentration in religious/theological studies

(to be acceptable preparation for ordination for the “professional” ministry)

Curriculum: All courses are prescribed (no electives or “advanced standing”)

All students take the same program (no majors or concentrations)

All classes are seminars (no lectures)

All reading assignments are original texts (no commentaries, surveys, or summaries)

All evaluation is based on participation and written papers (no quizzes, tests, grades)

Enrollment: Limited to 300 full-time students

Full-time enrollment is expected of all students

Part-time enrollment is possible; part-time students must take two classes—either both Language & Bible or both Theology & Music/Rhetoric (preferably in that order)

Faculty: Chosen for their ability to be *thoughtful*, and to foster intelligent and meaningful *conversations* with students and with one another

All faculty work toward the goal of teaching all subjects; and teach as fellow learners, not as experts delivering knowledge

The goal is a faculty to student ratio of 1:12

Doctrinal Basis: Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Chalcedon, plus a formal (i.e., confessional) or personal statement of "mere Christianity"

ACADEMIC PROGRAM

	Year One	Year Two			Year Three		
Bible: [2]	Genesis – Esther	Job – Malachi			2 nd Temple – Revelation		
Language:	Hebrew I – II	Hebrew III	Greek I		Greek II – III		
Theology: ²	Greeks – Early Fathers	Medieval – Reformation			Enlightenment – Modern		
Music & Rhetoric:	Music I – II	Music III	<i>Foci</i>	Paper	Rhetoric	<i>Foci</i>	Paper

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: A NEW MODEL

Abstract

This program of theological study seeks to serve the Church by preparing men and women for ministry who know the importance of *understanding*—seeking *clarity*—in ministry, and the value of the listening conversation that fosters that understanding. This paper has four main parts: (1) it describes a unique theological *curriculum* that could be adapted for any Christian confession; (2) it describes a *pedagogy* of humility (conversational learning); (3) it suggests some implications for students and faculty; and (4) it lists some of the values entailed by that description.[\[3\]](#)

The curriculum reflects a vision for personal and ministerial formation,[\[4\]](#) based on the conviction that at the heart of ministry and of life lie (1) the skill of *listening* to and *hearing* others; and (2) a considered *awareness* of one’s relationship to the world and history of human thought, including, but not limited to, the development of biblical revelation and of theological understanding.[\[5\]](#)

This proposal began as a personal search to clarify my own educational values and goals as I searched for a position in academe, so that I might be able to assess my “fit” with a particular school, and so that I might be able to respond to the standard interview question “Do you have any questions for us?” Reading about the curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional ethos of a number of schools, including St. John’s College, Thomas Aquinas College, Shimer College, and Thomas More College of Liberal Arts (New Hampshire) encouraged me to consider the possibility of a similar approach to theological education.[\[6\]](#)

To foster the conversation between
important *ideas* expressed in great *texts*
&
the *hearts* and *minds* of its students and faculty
for the sake of the Kingdom of God
and the good of his world.

To pursue truth with friends.

Learn · Live · Serve

Read · Listen · Talk · Think · Write

Texts

Ideas · Thoughts · Convictions

“Education is ... the process leading away from passivity,
beyond either unquestioning acceptance of authority or its automatic mistrust,
and towards informed, responsible action.”

Shimer College

I. ACADEMIC PROGRAM

This section outlines the content of and rationale for the program proper—its list of courses. Three of the curriculum’s four courses are three years long: (1) **Languages**; (2) **Bible**; (3) **Theology**. The fourth “track” consists of three semesters of **Music**, one semester of **Rhetoric**, two half-semester “electives” (*foci*), and two half-semesters devoted to preparing and writing major papers. All courses are required of all students. There is no advanced standing or transfer into the program.

1. *Biblical Languages*

The poem “Readings”, by Polish Nobel Laureate Czeslaw Milosz, begins with these lines:

You asked me what is the good of reading the Gospels in Greek.

I answer that it is proper that we move our finger

Along lines more enduring than those carved in stone,

And that, slowly pronouncing each syllable,

We discover the true dignity of speech.

Compelled to be attentive we shall think of that epoch

No more distant than yesterday, though the heads of Caesars

On coins are different today. ... (lines 1-8)[\[7\]](#)

The careful attention to the text of any document which is essential to genuine understanding is the goal of this program and course in biblical languages.

Biblical Hebrew and Greek are studied for three semesters each, first Hebrew, then Greek. These three semesters function as a single course; together they comprise a six-semester, three-year course in "Language".[\[8\]](#) Since theological students and those preparing for ministry study Hebrew and Greek mainly in order to reflect on the biblical text in its "original" form,[\[9\]](#) assignments throughout the course in language are linked as closely as possible to the readings for the seminar in Bible (below).

The first three semesters of this course are devoted to *Biblical Hebrew*. Students begin immediately to examine aspects of the Hebrew text of the passages that they are reading for the seminar in Bible. The initial exercises are necessarily quite simple, but progress to translating most or all of the passage to be discussed.

Since they read (= translate) the text in coordination with the reading assignments for the course in Bible, students study the Hebrew text of each major genre according to the canon of the English Bible. They also progress from the linguistically straightforward biblical narratives found in the Pentateuch and historical books to the more varied and complex language of biblical wisdom, poetry, and prophecy.

In their fourth semester, students begin studying *Biblical Greek*, again using exercises based on and drawn from the biblical text. Since they begin to study Greek while they are still reading the Old Testament, exercises for Greek I are based on the Septuagint of the prophetic books);[\[10\]](#) they will read the passages for the seminar in Bible primarily in Hebrew, supplemented by Greek; reading the LXX entails comparing the Greek to the Hebrew text.

In Greek II and III (fifth and sixth semesters), in which they read materials from the Second Temple period and the New Testament for the course in Bible, students also translate some or all of those the same passages from Greek, study quotations from and allusions to the Old Testament in both Hebrew and Greek, and read selected early Christian documents in Greek, such as the *Didache*.

Study of Hebrew and Greek raises questions about historical, comparative, and applied linguistics, as well as textual criticism, translation theory, textual meaning, and other linguistic aspects of reading, such as comparative lexicography, lexical semantics, and discourse analysis.

This course in the biblical languages has three primary goals. First, students should be ready and eager to consult the biblical text in those languages as a *first* resort, since they will have read much of Scripture in Hebrew or Greek, and since they will have seen how helpful it is to study the “original” text. This principle of the “first-reach” will have become an organic part of their study of Scripture, not merely an exercise to prepare them for that study. Their linguistic competence will include basic lexical,^[11] morphosyntactic, and text-linguistic functions, and—since the Bible consists of literary works—sensitivity to literary aspects of the text, such as prosody, poetics, and hermeneutics of the different biblical genres.

The second goal of studying the biblical languages, which is addressed by coordinating this study with the readings for the course in Bible, is that students immediately discuss texts that they have translated for their course in language. This means that they will have discussed the translation, linguistic “shape”, and meaning of the text before discussing its significance. Meaning, significance, and translation are closely linked, and the process of determining the implications of the grammar and syntax of a passage is both an aspect and a product of biblical and theological reflection. This language-based discussion also helps students learn which kinds of questions best lead to the text’s function and meaning.

Finally, three years of intensive study of the Hebrew and Greek text of Scripture “relativizes” the significance of the English versions of the Bible, as students experience and appreciate the complex of compromises that are endemic to the process of translation, and as they understand that the goal is not the perfect, complete, or right version of a passage, but the relative validity of a given rendering. Long before finishing the program, they realize the extent to which translation entails interpretation—that no text can be translated without showing the translator’s “fingerprints”, whether they be historical, stylistic, literary, or theological.

The primary goal of language study is thus to gain a tool—the *literary* and *linguistic* competence needed to read and understand the biblical text, a competence that grows most naturally out of an approach to learning the “biblical” languages that views every human language as a coherent and consistent system of interdependent parts;^[12] as a result of this “symphonic” approach, students will learn to see “lower-level” structures (e.g., verbal conjugations) in terms of their discourse-level function *when they first encounter them*, rather than as a later, “advanced” step.^[13]

Both languages are studied in “lab” sessions, in which the tutor’s primary responsibility is to help students learn how to understand what they read, and how to weigh the validity of

meaning(s) that they have “discovered” in the text. This is done by raising questions that help students discuss and understand the relationship between the (“original”) biblical text, their assumptions about its meaning, their own renderings and understanding of it, and the biblico-theological implications of its meaning.

All six semesters of language study entail a good deal of writing—at least four papers per semester. Students write inductive essays (not research papers), a task that prepares them for the kind of study that they will do as ministers, when most will be thrown back on their own resources—the ability to read, to reflect, and to suggest or tender their own understanding—without the resources of an institutional library. Tutors may suggest topics, but students have relative freedom to choose the topics of their papers^[14]; the “major papers”, written at the end of the second and third years, may address any part of the curriculum or even some other topic of the student’s choice.

2. *The Bible*

The course in Bible consists of a three-year seminar that discusses the entire Bible over 168 classes, and therefore in 168 passages,^[15] each of which is the subject of a two-hour seminar.^[16] Students thus discuss the entire canon at length, in conversations begun by a tutor’s opening question.

The course in Bible begins with Genesis 1; it concludes with Revelation 22 as students finish their third year. Along the way, students will have read and discussed the entire canon in English, Hebrew, Greek, or some combination thereof (above), and written about many biblical passages, ideas, and themes. The seminar in Bible discusses the Old Testament for two years (four semesters), and begins the fifth semester with selected readings from the Second Temple literature,^[17] followed by the entire New Testament.

In discussing the Bible canonically from Genesis through Revelation,^[18] students draw on earlier conversations and readings. When they arrive at, e.g., the gospels they will see that the life and ministry of Christ addresses the expectations that have preceded it; they read the book of Acts and the epistles as responses to and reflections on not only the life of Christ, but on the entire story that began in Genesis; finally, they discuss the Revelation to St. John as the climax of the canon.

Students read the assigned biblical passage at least once each day between sessions, so that they are well familiar with it when they discuss it. And, as they learn more of each language, they read increasingly large portions of the week’s assignment in Hebrew, Greek, or both (above), which should enable them to raise salient linguistic points—including grammatical, syntactical, lexical, and translational issues—in their conversations in the seminar.

The goals of this course are several. First, its relatively slow pace will help students become familiar with the contents, sweep, and flow of the canon, so that they read it as a whole in which each part contributes something integral to the overall message. They will also learn to recognize and assess apparently unique or unusual perspectives as well as those ideas or themes that gain their strength by repetition.

Secondly, students will appreciate the structure of redemptive history, since they begin to encounter the stories of the incarnation after two years of canonical reading. They are also prepared to discuss intra-canonical quotations and allusions in both testaments. This approach also encourages them to read the Hebrew Bible as the first stage(s) of that history of redemption and as revelatory documents with their own valid message(s).

Thirdly, students will learn that they can wrestle with and come to some understanding of even difficult texts, apart from expert opinion. They will see the value of trying to understand a passage on their own, rather than to begin their study by turning immediately to the “best-resource-as-expert”.[\[19\]](#)

Finally, and most importantly, this approach to studying Scripture sets the Bible free in the hearts and lives of its students. They are not presented with pre-digested or packaged interpretations or explanations, nor will they spend a major portion of the course learning the history of a book’s interpretation or criticism (an approach that encourages them to view Scripture primarily from the perspectives of critics, teachers, and their books—however well-intentioned or valid those perspectives may be). Instead, they are reading—and struggling to grasp the significance and implications of—the biblical text itself, learning from its agenda rather than that of their teacher or of biblical academe.

It should be clear at this point that “Language” and “Bible” are interdependent “halves” of a single course, throughout and by means of which students discuss passages both linguistically and canonically, which explicitly and implicitly reinforces the usefulness of their language studies in reading and understanding the biblical text (above).

3. Theology

In the three-year seminar in Christian theology, the search to understand existence in the light of who God is, as he has chosen to reveal himself in his words and deeds—learning to say of what is that it *is*, and of what is not that it is not[\[20\]](#)—students read and discuss the great works that have shaped the Church’s understanding of God and his creation.

Extensive reading assignments in this course include primary sources in philosophy, theology, history, and literature.

Christian theological systems from the very earliest centuries of the Church have been shaped by Greek *philosophy*, understanding Plato and Aristotle (for example)[\[21\]](#) is integral to understanding the theological debates and conclusions of the past two thousand years. In the same way, the influence of neo-Platonism and Stoicism upon much Christian teaching about personal morality, self-discipline, and the “spiritual life” suggests that exploring these teachings will help future ministers think about how the Church has historically understood the Christian life of individual believers and of groups.

Students begin by reading and discussing selected texts of the Greek philosophers before moving on to the Apostolic Fathers and other early [Eastern and Western] Church Fathers, creeds, and conciliary statements. In the middle of their second year they begin to read texts from the rise of Christian humanism and the “Renaissance”. The third year examines the history of Western thought—both the philosophical and the explicitly theological—from the “Enlightenment” into the twentieth century.

“Theology” is defined broadly, so that in this course students consider not only philosophy and theology, but also works of literature, and writings that discuss the life and calling of the Christian and of the Christian minister/leader, as well as the writings of historians through the ages.

The readings in “history” begin with Classical historians (e.g., Herodotus, Xenophon, Plutarch), as well as early Christian histories (e.g., Eusebius, Bede), so that students discuss the data of history, their meaning and significance, and—by reading these works in conjunction with works of literature, philosophy, and theology—see their mutual influence and interdependence.

As in the courses on language and Bible, students regularly write text-based “inductive” essays that address various theological, historical, and cultural themes or ideas that arise in the works read—essays aimed at understanding and exploring the implications of those ideas in their own time and even for today.

The primary goal of this course is to enable students to grasp the historical development and expression of Christian understanding and thought, so that as ministers they can draw on the wealth of more than two thousand years of human and Christian thought.

Secondly, knowing what *was* helps us interpret and understand what *is*, or—at the very least—provides a sense of proportion for our own situations, as suggested by Solzhenitsyn’s *leitmotif*—“Dwell on the past and you’ll lose an eye . . . Forget the past and you’ll lose both eyes” (1973 xxii). It arms them against the “chronological snobbery” that thinks that what is new is necessarily better or more worthwhile, and from the “theological snobbery” that sees their own ecclesiastical or confessional background as the only valid way to understand the biblical testimony, the nature of the created order, and human experience.

Aside: Theological Orthodoxy

It may be fitting in the context of discussing the course in theology to address the question of this school's confessional base or doctrinal position. The contents of the curriculum mean that students and faculty alike study documents from a wide spectrum of historical, philosophical, and ecclesiastical perspectives, rather than limiting their focus to a particular segment of the Church. Is any of these to be privileged, or would that privileging obviate one of the purposes of the program: to learn to pursue an avenue of inquiry to a satisfactory (even if incomplete) conclusion.

While a school could base itself confessionally on any one of many statements of faith or doctrine, the broadly Christian nature of this curriculum suggests that an appropriate doctrinal basis might be subscription *ex animo* by all members of the faculty and board to the "universally orthodox" creedal statements and formulations of the early Church (e.g., Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Chalcedon), together with a brief statement of fundamental beliefs, or each faculty member could subscribe to the universal creeds (as above) and indicate which later creedal statement, confession, catechism, &c. he or she found most helpful.

This would reflect the nature and convictions inherent within the program itself, and offer the practical benefit of freeing the school to hire as tutors those who can best foster and participate in thoughtful conversation, without dominating it.[\[22\]](#)

It also seems natural to wonder how such a program might ensure the validity of students' theological thought and conclusions, or (in other words) *whether or not* such a program can ensure its graduates' orthodoxy.

First, no school, program, or doctrinal position—signed, confessed, or "subscribed to"—ensures the orthodoxy or orthopraxis of those enrolled in a program or of its graduates.

Secondly, orthodoxy may be a more likely outcome of the clarifying, refining, and validating processes of reading, conversing, and writing, than it is of the process of precept (i.e., dictation) and repetition.

The goal of this program is that students *understand* and consider the questions raised by every text that they read—including the Bible—whether by reading that text on their own, by improving or correcting that understanding in conversation, by demonstrating their understanding (and sharpening it yet further) by expressing it formally in writing, or all or some of these. This cannot but help have a healthy effect on their thinking and understanding; this pedagogy assumes that "the truth will out".

4. *Music & Rhetoric*

The fourth part of this curriculum has four components: *music* (three semesters), *rhetoric* (one semester), two short “focus” courses (one-half semester each), and two major papers.

One-eighth of the curriculum entails the study of music because of its importance to individual and corporate Christian life and worship (cf. King 1990) *and* its ubiquity in modern life, which together suggest that ministers and leaders need to understand it, even if they are not musicians themselves. It also offers a historical perspective on Christian music from Gregory and Palestrina to the 20th century that will help students see that “Christian” music did not begin in 2001, 1989, 1967, or even in 1942.

In three semesters of music, students learn to read, sing, and listen to music of the Western tradition, so that they understand elementary music theory, including basic principles of harmony, rhythm, the link between music and lyrics, and are able to read and understand a musical score (which is closely related to the art and skill of “reading” a literary text).

They sing, listen to, read, study, and discuss various works of sacred and secular music from medieval chant to the modern period, which also entails considering the function and rôle of music in the personal and communal life of faith. The course ends by analyzing the libretto and score of a major classical work, such as a Bach cantata, or an oratorio or other work by, for example, Haydn, Mozart, Handel, Mendelssohn, or a later composer.

The course in music aims to help students learn how to hear music, rather than merely respond or react to it, so that they can participate intelligently in the inevitable discussions about music that arise in churches.^[23] It also helps those in the “professional” ministry avoid picking hymns with appropriate lyrics but unsingable melodies.

b. *Rhetoric*

In the fifth semester, students study and practice rhetoric in the Aristotelian sense, i.e. that the art of public speaking is an intellectual pursuit. After four semesters of seminars, students should have learned how to listen to, understand, and communicate in formal and casual conversation, and to understand an author’s text by reading, conversing, and writing. In “Rhetoric”, they study and practice the art of deliberate and formal public speech to inform or persuade, or both.

Students read and discuss Classical works on rhetoric (e.g., Aristotle, Cicero), discuss how to formulate and present a “message” to a group,^[24] and then prepare and deliver messages

to their classmates. After finishing his or her speech, the speaker joins the rest of the class around the table, and then listens as a previously designated member of the group asks an opening question based on the message or biblical text, which is then discussed as in any other seminar. For about ten minutes, the speaker listens to the rest of the group discuss the text in the light of what he or she said, and then is free to join the conversation.

The goal of this conversation is not to validate the message, its exegesis, or its theology, but (1) to help speakers hear what their listeners heard and understood; (2) to understand what the speaker said and what he or she meant by saying it; and (3) to discuss the relationship between the message and its text.

In many churches, a “preacher” delivers a monologue that explains a biblical passage and shows the congregation how its meaning (“content”) relates (“applies”) to their lives.^[25] The text appears as a gift—neatly wrapped and beribboned—so that the sermonic message need only be accepted with thanks. The course in rhetoric assigns the sermon a different rôle in the life of the local congregation and community.

In this course, students learn to prepare messages that focus the attention of their listeners on the biblical text in a way that encourages them to consider its meaning and implications. Rather than answering every question raised by that text, they learn to suggest directions for further thought and consideration. Such a sermon aims to open a conversation, not to end it. The goal, in other words, is to reconceptualize the sermon or homily (&c.) so that it initiates a thoughtful conversation that can continue among the members of the group (congregation) as well as among members of the group and the speaker (minister).

Such messages require a great deal of study, thought, reflection, and prayer. This type of study, thought, and reflection are the same in kind as the essays that students write for their courses in Bible, theology, and language, essays that are not looking for “default” or “easy” answers, but that instead pursue the thread of the argument to some conclusion, recognizing its tentative nature even as they suggest it to their listeners (or readers).

These messages also require a deep and intimate knowledge and understanding of the congregation—the kind of knowledge that comes from listening well to those to whom one seeks to minister—if the sermon is to address both the substance of the text and the hearts of its hearers.

c. Foci

Seemingly apart from the uniform general curriculum, every student also chooses two *foci*—seminars roughly equivalent to “electives” that address specific topics within the larger range of the curriculum. Foci are offered in the first half of the students’ fourth and sixth semesters. The topics are generally chosen from a work read as part of the curriculum: a specific book, passage,

or genre of Scripture; a theological or philosophical topic, person, period, or “school”; a historical event, era, person, or topic (e.g., the history or polity of a denomination or movement); a genre, period, or specific work of literature, music, or art (or an author, artist, or composer).

Topics are suggested by and agreed upon in joint discussions between students and tutors; in a sort of “poll”, students sign up for three topics that they would like to study, and are assigned to a particular *focus* based on their schedules and the need to balance class populations. For each focus students write an essay exploring some aspect of that course.

d. *Essays*

In this program, essays are brief written works of 300-1500 words (one to five pages), in which students explore ideas and their implications. Each essay focuses on a single main idea, and is an opportunity for a student to discover whether or not he or she understands an idea well enough to explain it clearly to someone else.

Essays are not based on extensive research; quotations and citations are limited to primary texts within the program, or primary works recommended by a tutor. An essay, in other words, lets a student ruminate on an idea in order to better his or her understanding of it, to test that understanding to his or her own satisfaction, and to offer it to others in order to test its capacity for furthering the larger conversation.

The essay should explore a text or idea in a way that explains it to the reader and investigates [suggests] its significance. Essays may thus appear to be more like sermons or homilies than like traditional “exegetical” or “theological” papers, although they may well begin by addressing interpretative or theoretical topics. An essay that ends with mere explication, however, has failed to complete its task—to explore an idea’s significance beyond itself.

e. *Major Papers*

Students have only three courses during the second half of their fourth and sixth semesters; in place of the fourth course in those semesters each student writes a major paper in consultation with a tutor that demonstrates his or her ability to define a question, to explore it in depth, including both its definition and implications, and to defend their thinking before a committee of the faculty.

These are called “major papers” to distinguish them from the normal essays that are assigned in all courses, and because they are significantly longer than in-course essays, generally at least 5000 words (c. fifteen pages).

e. *Summary*

The program described above thus consists of four “courses”: Bible, Language, Theology, and Music & Rhetoric, approached canonically (Bible) or chronologically (Theology, Music, Rhetoric). This table, reproduced from the executive summary, outlines the program.

TABLE I: ACADEMIC PROGRAM

	Year One		Year Two			Year Three		
Language:	Hebrew I	Hebrew II	Hebrew III	Greek I		Greek II	Greek III	
Bible: [26]	Genesis – Deuteronomy	Joshua – Esther	Job – Isaiah 39	Isaiah 40 – Malachi	2 nd Temple – Luke		John – Revelation	
Theology: ²⁶	Greeks – Fathers		Medieval – Renaissance			Enlightenment – Modern		
Music & Rhetoric:	Music I	Music II	Music III	<i>Foci</i>	Paper	Rhetoric	<i>Foci</i>	Paper

f. *Enrollment*

This program will most benefit students who can study full-time. Part-time enrollment is possible, but only if students take two courses together: either Language and Bible (which form a single “meta-course”, above) or Theology & “Music”. They should plan to take Language and Bible first, after which they should take Theology and “Music”.

II. PEDAGOGY

Every pedagogical style implicitly—and perhaps primarily—teaches a particular attitude toward learning and ministry, and even the student’s sense of personal worth. Every class session in this program is a conversational seminar; this section describes this conversational pedagogy of humility.

The Nature of Learning

All knowledge is acquired in one of two ways: either through personal experience (which we recognize as and call “experience”) or the experience(s) of others, which we learn by oral or written report (and which are usually presented or treated as “facts”). “Experience” in this context refers not merely to physical events, but includes mental reflection.[\[27\]](#)

Learning vicariously entails hearing or reading another person’s claim to have learned (again, by their own experience or vicariously); vicarious learning enables civilization to survive, since we do not need to repeat every experiment or research project so that each generation relives or recreates the history of the human to that point, but can instead depend and build upon the work (the experience) of those who have gone before us; to the extent that we find their claims valid and trustworthy, we trust those claims. Vicarious learning allows “culture” to be transmitted from one generation to another, whether the word “culture” refers to conclusions drawn from scientific observation and experiment, or from moral reflection and insight, or to philosophical, theological, or other approaches to understanding the created order within which we exist.

Since reality is universal, truth can be expressed with regard to any aspect of creation, and creation is, in that sense, *true*. A reflex of the creative act of God, truth’s ubiquity means that newly realized truth is available at any point of investigation; its discovery means that we have come to understand something of which we were previously ignorant (or innocent). That which is true is also available from (nearly) any source; we consider the validity of a statement or observation, not its source (apologies to Thomas Aquinas).

All that we can discover and understand is reality; this understanding we call “truth”, that which describes what is—the way things are, so that to tell the truth is to say of *what* is *that* it is. Truth does not, therefore, exist in abstract, separate from existence, but exists on a secondary level as an expression of our understanding; insofar as that understanding conforms to the realities of existence, we may call it “truth”. The search to understand is therefore also the search for truth—the process of conforming our thoughts to reality itself, and thus to discovering the nature of the created order, and our place in it.

Truth’s ubiquity further suggests its fundamentally connectional nature. Since the universe is the product of a personal act of creation, existence is a unity; its unity means that every point of reality is eventually connected or related to every other point, so that our

understanding of any point leads, eventually or immediately, directly or indirectly, to every other point.[\[28\]](#)

A person's ability to understand is limited by his or her personality and background (including race, creed, language, education, &c.). These inescapable limitations, however, only make this pedagogy more important, for both students and faculty. They also make it invalid for a teacher to assert his or her views without allowing them to be questioned or examined.

Furthermore, "understanding" in this context refers to more than merely recognizing that something is true. It means being thoughtful—learning to think beyond the "what" of "the facts" [truth] to the implications of those facts. Nor are these implications merely the next logically valid steps in a chain of cognitive conclusions (although they may be that), but are rather attempts to answer the question of prudence, which says, "This being so, how ought I (we) to live?"

Learning to be "thoughtful" means learning how to explore what our understanding of ideas—our newly discovered or recognized "truth"—implies for our manner of life, and thus for our health and well-being as created beings in a created order. To be thoughtful is thus to explore and suggest moral implications of our understanding, and to do so in a way that is thoughtful and thought-provoking, persuasive and winsome.

If this is a goal of an educational program, the pedagogy itself must be both thoughtful and reflective.

A conversational pedagogy deliberately implies that learning is as communal as it is personal; individual understanding is most effectively reinforced, stretched, and strengthened in conversation, especially with those who are studying the same questions, whether they are living or dead, whether the conversation is oral or written.

a. A Pedagogy of Humility

Every session of every course in this program is a seminar—an open-ended conversation[\[29\]](#) that focuses on understanding the text at hand. There are no in-class lectures.[\[30\]](#) The goal of every class session is to spend time together discussing, analyzing, pondering, thinking about, investigating a particular text—biblical, theological, philosophical, historical, literary, musical—in a conversation sparked by the opening statement, e.g., "The question before us is ..." or "What does the author mean when he [or she] says ...?"

Class sessions consist of conversations between an author, the ideas contained in his or her text, and the learners gathered about that text, whether the author is Ezekiel or Pascal, Bach or Aquinas, and whether the tutor is encountering the work for the first time, or is a Hebraist, musician, or philosopher (or a world-class expert on Ezekiel, Pascal, Bach, or Aquinas).

Everyone in the room participates equally in the conversation as a learner, seeking understanding for the others' sakes as well as for his or her own.

The goal is to understand a particular text or passage, which everyone has already read. Since reading entails understanding, or at least the attempt to understand, every person's reading must be tested against the text itself, so that each member of the class tests his or her own interpretation and those of the rest of the class by considering it in light of the text and of the other interpretations in the room. Submitting one's reading of the text to someone else in a conversation is an exercise in humility that becomes a means of grace for both the individual and the rest of the class, when done in a spirit of mutual encouragement and joint discovery, which is the attitude that the tutor and institution seek to establish for each class session and for the program as a whole.

This conversational "pedagogy of humility" furthers the overall goals of the entire program by helping students learn to listen as they read and converse. It encourages them to speak thoughtfully, knowing that their own words and ideas will be weighed for the light that they shed upon the text, question, or decision at hand. It also helps them as they learn to write by teaching them to probe, explore, and understand, and to express that understanding for the benefit of others, so that the journey from (original) text to their own context is one *from humility* before the master from whom they learn *to humility* before those who will hear, read, and test their thought and insight.

Common to good conversation is the desire to hear and to understand others, and to speak so that one's own thoughts help clarify the point of the conversation. Common to good conversationalists is not only a genuine interest in the person and thoughts of others, but the skill to recognize the opportune moment for speaking: "The best university is a rhetorical community of friends, ... with words so full of care that they release the light of brilliance" (Crider 2005, 12-13).

Individuals bring different backgrounds and experiences to the discussion, and may therefore disagree sharply, even to the point that some will feel that their cherished beliefs or convictions are challenged or threatened.

The students and tutors in such a program would know that the goal was to *strengthen* their ability to understand one another and themselves, to *clarify* their understanding of the ideas found in texts, and to *express* and *develop* their own thoughts.

Hence a pedagogy of humility, which replaces the *professor* with the *tutor*,^[31] a fellow learner with more experience at learning, who may or may not be further along the path that the students are treading, but who is willing to subject his own knowledge to the conversational process for the students' sakes—so that they can learn how to learn.

Hence seminars and conversational learning, rather than lectures and dictated transmission.

Hence a single table, around which the entire class—tutor and students—sit without hierarchical implications[32] (i.e., there is no designated “tutor’s chair”).

Hence original sources that are recognized classics—the conversation begins with and centers around the greatest minds and thoughts of the Western world; pedagogical conversation requires interaction with the ideas as they were expressed by their authors or explicators. It also requires the depth found in the best texts; like a river, a true conversation rise above its source.

Hence the reiterated statement that this education is conversational, whether the particular conversation be between the student and the ideas contained in the text, between one learner and another, or between the learner and his or her own heart as she or he reflects, explores, and writes about the subject.

Hence also the lack of grades or tests (quizzes, exams), as an implicit reminder that learning and understanding are good in themselves, and that a grade—inaccurate and arbitrary at best—may in fact mask impoverished or non-existent understanding.

b. Pedagogy & Ministry

A recent study on failure in ministry funded by the Lilly Foundation noted that one of the two most common reasons for ministerial failure is relational conflict.[33] We might reasonably ask if any of the blame for this rests on the education of those ministers.

A person who has passed from kindergarten through secondary school and university to seminary and into the ministry has spent about twenty years in the social setting of the classroom. There the teacher is not only the institutionally-certified expert on the subject at hand, but also the unchallenged authority who determines and defines every aspect of the course, including its content and goals, the means to accomplish those goals (textbooks, assignments), and the method and means of assessing whether or not—and to what extent—students have realized those goals (quizzes, tests, papers, projects). There is no pretense that the playing field is level; all power resides in the teacher (student course evaluations notwithstanding).

After spending a large portion of their lives in a setting that implicitly assigns to students relative worth, value, and potential—and that also provides students with a uniform rôle model[34]—seminary graduates are sent out to serve the church.

After years (decades!) in an environment that communicates four primary messages: (1) the expert stands at the front of the room and knows everything—what is important and why, the right questions and (most importantly) the right answers; (2) he or she may or may not choose to hear or respond to the others in the room; (3) he or she has, in effect, determined the end from before the beginning; and (4) he or she is the only person who is accountable to no one else in the room.

After such a lengthy, relentless indoctrination, this consistent model of teacher-as-leader/expert/authority/power-broker far too easily transmogrifies into pastor-as-leader/expert/..., making it highly unlikely that pastors will listen to, let alone hear, those who are said to be “under” their care.^[35] When this model, with its implications of pastoral superiority, authority, and power, confronts the experience, insight, wisdom (and—to be fair—the expectations, fear, and egos) of elders, deacons, and other church leaders, we ought to be astounded that more ministers do not crash and burn. It is not merely that “[p]ower tends to corrupt, but absolute power corrupts absolutely”, as Lord Acton so famously said, but also the assumption that one’s education and office grants that power.

The pedagogy of humility—learning by reading, talking, and writing—explicitly confronts this problem.

c. The Tutor’s Rôle

The goals of this program and its pedagogy directly affect the rôle of the faculty.

First, faculty are not “teachers” or “professors”—i.e., they are not experts—but rather those who have learned to ask meaningful questions and to participate in reflective, truth-seeking conversations. They have learned to practice this pedagogy of humility, recognizing that insight comes not from degrees earned, but is offered to all by the author of the text.

Their questions foster conversations that clarify the meaning of the text. These are not leading questions, but instead questions designed to help the students consider carefully what has been said, whether in the text or in the conversation to that point. The tutor does not guide the discussion, nor does he or she end the class session by “correcting”, “wrapping up”, or “summing up” the day’s talk, but instead—having asked the opening question—participates as he or she would in any conversation.

Tutors may offer information that students do not yet have, correct mistaken statements or claims, or call the class back to the text at hand. In discussing biblical poetry, for example, students may need to learn to avoid reading into the English vocabulary or verbal form(s).^[36] In the same way, reading a medieval text might require a point of vocabulary or grammar or historical background. Information of this type could be offered as in any conversation, but even here, the tutor’s first recourse is to questions that will help students think their way through to a valid understanding, but *without usurping the process* of reaching that insight. Tutors must neither be nor allow themselves to be viewed as resident experts, who supply answers or “straighten out” the class when the discussion bogs down. On the other hand, they must be able to ask questions that further the conversation.

Secondly, tutors must understand that they truly are—and are not merely called—fellow learners, who like the rest of the class seek to test and strengthen their own understanding of the

text. Furthermore, they are willing to let the class trace its own path, because they trust the overall process. This is a difficult path to trace, but the greater the extent to which it is followed, the more effective the entire program will be.[\[37\]](#)

Since conversations are “open-ended”, the tutor does not direct the conversation, but rather participates by interacting with the observations, questions, and conclusions of the students, just as they interact with his or hers; there is no privileged opinion, just as there are no privileged questions: every question that is asked is assumed to be worthy of consideration.

Identifying *conversation as learning* incidentally reveals the importance and significance of the *opening question*: the very best opening questions will be those with which the tutor him- or herself is wrestling (which is a challenge when reading *Cur Deus Homo* or 1 John for the tenth time). A standard aspect of faculty life is an ongoing program of formal and informal faculty study groups, in which faculty discuss among themselves the programmatic works, or in which a tutor leads a group in an area of his or her specialty or interest. This ensures that tutors continue to experience the rôle of learner—even of the texts that they study in class year after year, as they explore both familiar and unfamiliar subjects. [See further on tutors, below.]

d. *The Safely Dangerous Classroom*

Faculty do not direct the conversations envisioned in this proposal toward any end beyond clarity, which means that these, like all genuine conversations, may wander from point to point, even to questions that may not relate directly to the text in hand.[\[38\]](#)

Since conversations are “open-ended”, their outcome cannot be predicted, which makes the classroom a place in which each person is trying to gain the ability to hear, understand, and appreciate a variety of viewpoints, even while submitting his or her viewpoints, interpretations, and convictions to the critiques of others. The goal of understanding *this* text means that each conversant must be willing to consider and test the validity of any suggested interpretation or “meaning”.[\[39\]](#)

Bringing together students from various doctrinal or ecclesiastical backgrounds nearly guarantees that the group will not reach agreement except on issues so broad and basic that they are those most fundamental to Christianity itself (e.g., “God exists” or “Jesus is Lord”)—and even on these issues there will most likely be various interpretations of those statements. But consensus or indoctrination are neither concerns nor goals.

The ethics of classroom behaviour therefore become crucial: close attention to others; politeness, kindness; interaction with ideas, not individuals; in these and other ways the guiding ethos of the classroom is the second great commandment to love your neighbour as yourself, to treat others as you would be treated.

e. *Grading*

In order to encourage students to reflect in order to understand, and to avoid reinforcing the idea that grades somehow reveal the extent of one's learning or education, there are no quizzes, tests, examinations, or grades in this program.[\[40\]](#)

Instead, in each course students write essays in which they explore either a passage or an idea raised by a text. These are not research or "response" papers, but thoughtful, inductive essays that show the student "thinking on paper" (Howard & Barton 1986) as he or she addresses some aspect of a text. In writing them, students are free to draw upon any of the readings in the program, or even on works outside "the list" of readings, but they are not to pursue research into secondary literature, such as biblical commentaries, interpretative monographs, journal articles, &c. An essay affords a student an opportunity to evaluate his or her interpretations of a text and the implications of that interpretation, and to test their ability to express and explain that understanding. The essay explores and demonstrates the *student's* thought, not the history of interpretation.

Essays in "Bible" and "Theology" might explore the translation or meaning of a text, or its theological, moral, or aesthetic implications; since they are distributed across the program, students will graduate having written a number of essays on each major biblical genre, as well as on major works from the range of Church history, theology, and philosophy. Tutors may suggest passages or topics, but normally students define and pursue their own questions.

Together with the student's participation in class discussions, these papers provide the faculty's means of evaluating the extent to which a student seems to be benefiting from the program, and progressing toward its goals. In addition to feedback on papers, each student meets with all of his or her tutors near the end of each semester in order to discuss his or her progress toward the goals of the program.

f. *Lectures*

Although there are no in-class lectures, lectures are integral to the overall program. Tutors and invited speakers deliver lectures that are followed by extensive conversations (not "question-and-

answer sessions”) between the lecturer and audience. These are chosen for their ability to supplement the program, and—as part of the curriculum—to exemplify its ethos of exploration and discovery.

In one- or two-month series of four to eight lectures (e.g.), different speakers would discuss topics chosen by the entire faculty in light of perceived “gaps” in the program. The goal would not be to present the “cutting edge” of scholarship, but rather to expose students to thoughtful and seasoned reflection on matters that ought to affect their understanding.

Topics might be as broad as “The Development of Trinitarian Doctrine”, “The Counter-Reformation”, or “An Overview of the Middle Ages”, or as specific as “The Significance of the Book of Proverbs for the Life of the Church”, “The History Behind Luther’s Ninety-five Theses”, or “Plato, Ecclesiastes, and Epictetus on the Meaning of Life”. Topics could also be even more directly applicable to ministry, e.g., “The Nature of the Ministry”, “William Law’s View of the Ministry”, or “Understanding Ministry in Light of the Pastoral Epistles”.

Each lecture would be followed by a discussion following the format of the classes described under “rhetoric” (above), in which the lecturer is invited to join a conversation about the topic. Two lecture series per semester would offer students twelve series during their time in the program, which would thus be twelve opportunities to interact with the studied and considered expertise of the lecturer. Opening these lectures to the public would mean, on the other hand, that students would hear the opinions and questions of the broader public (including those already in ministries), as well as of interested and concerned lay leadership and membership in various communities of faith.

III. SOME IMPLICATIONS

1. *Faculty*

As mentioned above, this program requires faculty willing to step away from the tradition of specialization, faculty willing to explore subjects which they may not have encountered (e.g., music theory, medieval theology, Biblical Hebrew), men and women willing to participate in ongoing conversations with their colleagues about the ideas and texts of the curriculum, and tutors willing to listen to conversations that they may have started, but which they cannot—and which they must not, for the students’ sakes—control or direct.[\[41\]](#)

Since tutors teach across the entire curriculum, all tutors would eventually conduct the seminars in each course (subject),[\[42\]](#) thus modeling for students the studious listening life and humility that ought to characterize those in ministry [This will be especially true the first few times that they encounter new subjects or readings.]

This “broad” learning reminds both faculty and students of the conviction that knowledge, truth, goodness, &c. are interconnected and interdependent—they are not allowed to find the sum of knowledge within their specialization, nor to treat their specialty as though it were “first among equals”; the conviction of the unity of truth replaces the pedagogical isolation and the fragmentation of knowledge caused by academic specialization. It assumes and implicitly reinforces the idea of a university. It also ensures the faculty’s ability to discuss the broad ideas and connections that students are discussing. Finally, teaching across the curriculum removes the stigma from the words “I don’t know”, and reminds students that most ministry calls for generalists who need to continue to learn and grow in both awareness and understanding.

The tutors’ primary responsibility is to foster students’ ability to interact with and understand the text, to listen to and understand one another, and to express their understanding orally and in writing.

Faculty would be chosen according to several criteria: (1) intellectual curiosity and interest in pursuing truth; (2) the ability to foster meaningful conversations in class and thoughtful oral and written reflection; and (3) the willingness and ability to converse meaningfully with students individually and in groups; and (4) the ability to function with this pedagogy. Further, since there are no faculty divisions or departments (indeed, no rank beyond “tutor”), faculty appointment amounts to choosing the right people for “the faculty and program” as a whole, rather than the right person for a particular position.

Tutors surrender the dream of becoming gem-distributing lecturers or ground-breaking researchers. Nor will they become world-famous or widely read authors. The demands of the program—studying new material in faculty conversations and seminars,^[43] conducting student seminars, offering series of lectures, meeting formally and informally with students individually and in small groups, reading and responding to papers, evaluating students’ fitness to progress in the program—will leave little time or energy for such pursuits.

Tenure would be based on their demonstrated fit with #1-4 (above), not on publications, papers, or other standard academic benchmarks.

2. Students

This program will not appeal to students who want “their money’s worth” from experts, who just want to know what will be on the test, or who determine how much they have learned by their grades. Applicants will be self-selecting, because this program differs radically from “standard” and “traditional” M.Div. or M.A.R. programs.^[44] It is not merely one choice among many.

The abilities that enable many students to “succeed” in school—figuring out what teachers [really] want, taking [the right] notes, “cramming” for exams, memorizing outlines and definitions—will not help them succeed in this program.

Here learning requires students who are willing to read, think, and converse, to seek insight by asking questions, to seek clarity, understanding, or insight through conversation, and to run this risk for their own sakes and for the sakes of their fellow learners. This willingness requires and fosters true humility, grace, patience, and tact, as students learn to hold positions and convictions lightly, willing to submit them to what may prove to be a more valid reading of the text. “It is a sign of the good [minister], as it is of the good friend, that he or she is willing to learn from others in the community, even if the lesson is sometimes embarrassing” (Crider 2005, 60).

Admission and matriculation are thus not based primarily on an applicant’s academic record or awards, but rather on his or her ability to engage in, contribute to, and grow through disciplined conversation and personal reflection and expression (writing), or—in other words—on an applicant’s maturity, self-motivation, and grace, or at least the potential for their development.

3. *Texts*

The texts studied in this curriculum are those works of Western civilization that encourage their readers to identify and seek to understand the fundamental ideas of Christianity, that wrestle with—rather than describe and catalog—the great ideas.[\[45\]](#)

Apart from the pedagogical tools necessary to begin to study language and music, the entire reading list for the program consists of primary texts.[\[46\]](#) Thus, “church history” begins with the book of Acts and includes Eusebius and other Church Fathers, as well as medieval texts such as Bede’s *History* and later texts. Rather than read about the development of medieval theology (with brief summaries of, or quotations from, “important” or “significant” figures and documents) students will read selections from the Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene Church Fathers, as well as Augustine, Aquinas, and many others chosen from throughout the history of the Church.

The first semester of Theology begins with selections from Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, setting the philosophical foundation for the patristic discussions of theology, showing that, as Pelikan says, the early Church spoke the “language of Zion with the unmistakable accents of the [Athenian] Academy” (1986, 12). In music, students encounter [Gregorian] chant, Palestrina, Vivaldi, Monteverdi, Bach, *et al.*, up into the 20th century, learning to read, understand, and sing from musical texts that have shaped and informed the worship of generations of the faithful.

The use of primary texts is pedagogical as much as principal. Extended reflection and conversation require strong ideas, stated well and explored deeply. Textbooks, by their very nature designed and written for “average” students, simply cannot bear such weight or exhibit such depth. They necessarily digest, summarize, abstract, synopsisize, and—at the very least—interpose a layer of understanding and interpretation between the ideas found in the text and the

reader or student. The primary text is the initial repository of its ideas *in that form*. Even when an author interacts with earlier writers (as, say, Aquinas with Boethius or Aristotle), he considers and offers both Aristotle's ideas and his reflections on them for our benefit.

Students in this program therefore read primary texts, what have come to be called "classics". What does this term mean in this context?

First, a classic has been *read by many people*, and has therefore been around for several generations (at least). Relatively recent works (i.e., those written within the past century) may shape contemporary thought, but a book's value—i.e., the value of its ideas and their expression—cannot be assessed upon its publication, and perhaps not even within the lifetime of its author's grandchildren. This is because any cultural artifact is so necessarily bound to its time and culture that it cannot be separated from them; the first generation or two of its readers therefore understand its way of thinking intuitively, and uncritically, and even those who can establish some critical distance are still reading from within the author's framework.

This cultural identity can suggest the illusion that something is an "instant classic",^[47] especially if it makes the best-seller lists, but instant acceptance reflects timeliness and accessibility, not permanence; popularity does not signal—or even suggest—a work's ability to sustain interest through generations or centuries.

The objection that mere survival does not make a classic is valid, despite Auden's claim that "[s]ome books are undeservedly forgotten; none are undeservedly remembered" (1962). The status of a work of literature (theology, history, &c.) is not signaled by its physical survival, even over a period of many centuries, but rather by its continuing rôle in the ongoing conversation. Books that exist but are not read have not truly survived; only those that are read and pondered, and continue to be mentioned or appealed to in the course of discussion or debate are living and vital texts.

Secondly, a classic creates enough interest in its subject to be *read more than once* during a lifetime, so that it serves as a touchstone or point of reference for any discussion of that subject. It is also a benchmark of a historical period or movement, or of a particular field of inquiry, granting some insight into an era or area of human thought and understanding. Classics can thus be provisionally identified based on their contribution to and effect upon the "conversation" since their appearance.

Thirdly, a classic has enough "resonance"—depth or complexity—to be read in *more than one way*, allowing or even encouraging re-interpretation when read again. Its meaning is not random or arbitrary; instead, its "depth" allows readers to reinterpret what they thought they already understood or knew—they discover more each time. It stimulates us to think and informs our thinking; it does not merely tell us what to think.

Fourthly, a classic addresses *fundamental questions* of the meaning of being "human"; its relevance is therefore permanent, not ephemeral or passing. This is one of the reasons that it has been read by many people (above). It points us toward subjects that are worthy of the time required for reflection and thought.

Fifthly, many classics are either conceptual or cultural *social-intellectual catalysts*, and therefore help us understand the Western culture in which we live and to which we minister. Classics exist in other cultures, of course, but they are classic to those cultures, rather than to this one. Students who hope or intend to minister in other venues will need to pursue culture-specific studies of the same type, based on works chosen by the same criteria.

Someone may well ask (indeed, many have asked) about the wisdom of primarily reading ancient and old texts, with relatively little time given to the twentieth century. There are several reasons for this.

First, we do not yet have enough perspective to know which of the flood of books now appearing will prove to have been true social-intellectual, theological, or ecclesiastical catalysts. From our perspective, it seems that it would be irresponsible not to read, for example, Wellhausen's *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, because it remains as foundational to biblical studies as Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* is to biology, but we cannot know which—if either—will be a mere historical curiosity in the 24th century. We may suspect that de Chardin, Barth, Nietzsche, or Derrida will or will not enjoy similar longevity, but we can barely begin to assess their real effect on our own time, let alone determine whether they will have any long-term impact on human thought or become mere footnotes for specialists or the curious.

Secondly, “old books” help us see changing fashions in thought from one “age” to the next. They show us that successive thinkers and authors constantly engage the thought and writings of the previous age, even as they interact with those of their own [48] (an engagement sometimes called the Great Conversation). They also reveal that thought does not so much “progress” as change from one age to the next; that it is a self-centered, self-satisfied arrogance that leads us to see contemporary thinking in terms of “Finally!” and “At last!”. New patterns or fashions of have never and, by their nature cannot, assure us that we are any closer to the truth that we profess to seek.

Reading the past demonstrates the point that our cultural setting bends us toward observational, inductive, and deductive conclusions that fit the assumptions that undergird our culture's view of the world. Confronting authors from other times in their own words, rather than in a laudatory or condemnatory synopsis in a survey, should warn students that their own methods and conclusions may someday be as open to criticism and dismissal as we find many of those of the ancients.

Furthermore, reading the past increasingly validates Qohelet's conclusion that “Nothing is new under the sun”. We do not need today's book to understand today's world (although tomorrow's might help). Human nature does not change; yesterday's issues and questions are today's, but today's thought is not matured or polished by generations of reflection and discussion. Reading and knowing the past will enable students to understand the deeper—the more basic—issues facing their ministries.

Another potential objection to devoting the necessary time and energy to primary texts is that there are good surveys and overviews of all of these subjects, many of which include summaries of the most important works, and which criticize their ideas, so that students can

spend more time on “practical” concerns. This would, however, undercut a major purpose of this program.

Ministers and pastors need to know how to understand difficult texts, whether they are biblical passages, works on theology or ministry, or essay in the news media. This goal is not well-served by a model that encourages learners to flee to some authority at the first sign of difficulty, whether that source be a former teacher, a commentary, or some other source of “expert knowledge”. Such flight means that pastors will minister by repeating or paraphrasing the learning of another (which may, of course, be itself merely another stage in a nearly-endless regression).[49] It also means that the individual who confronted by a new or unusual idea must wait until that idea is addressed by one of his or her trusted experts, who will explain how he or she should respond to it, which in turn reinforces the cult of the expert as well as the expectation that the non-expert will depend on him or her.[50]

IV. OUTCOMES

From among a number of potential outcomes of this curriculum, this section discusses two: its effect on the lives of its *graduates* and its effect on the *Church* through their lives and ministries.

1. *Graduates in Ministry*

Because conversation is a mainstay of life, and because churches are filled with people with varied backgrounds and experiences, the abilities and skills gained through this pedagogy are directly transferable to ministry.

All ministry is an unending conversation, whether the particular discussion entails counseling, studying, preaching, praying, deciding, leading, serving, teaching, or anything other aspect of life. Conversational learning implies that ministry begins when we are able to hear what is being said, whether the “speaker” is a biblical author of several thousand years ago, a couple contemplating marriage, a medieval theologian, or a critic of one’s own ministry.[51]

Future ministers need to study in a community in which everyone knows that the end of conversation is to discover “[t]he truth of the matter at hand, not as an object possessed, but as a disposition toward the subject, a disposition that is truer than before the rhetorical moment” (Crider 2005, 13), and that their rôle is not merely, or even primarily, passive (i.e., they are not present merely to take notes), but active: they should be seeking to understand the issue, text, question, &c. in order to conform their thinking to what is true and valid, and therefore good.

Graduates of a program based on a pedagogy of humility will themselves be humble, quick to listen and slow to speak, wanting to clarify others' meaning and intent—whether the others are authors or conversational partners. They will also realize that “their” insights are really the result of reflecting on the insights of others. After three years of conversational learning, in which they learn to listen to those around them as they work together toward the answer to a question or the solution of a problem, they will be prepared to listen more carefully and attentively to others, knowing that it is usually a group's collective wisdom that sees its way most clearly to a solution.

Having participated in hundreds of hours of formal and informal conversations in search of understanding, they will have learned that insight cannot be forced or rushed; having heard from classmates from a wide spectrum of human experience, maturity, and backgrounds; they will know that a helpful and even vital contribution can come from the least expected—and even least respected—source, and so they will elicit participation in conversations, be prepared to listen to and weigh a contribution on its merits, apart from its source; they will be patient in the search for the best solution to challenges facing their ministries. They will have learned that “no one is competent to judge beforehand to judge what knowledge will prove important (i.e., relevant) or unimportant to the theologian” (Pieper 1989, 176); I would add that this statement applies to every discussion, whether the topic is theological or not.

This same humility will also affect the minister's view of the nature of biblical interpretation and theologizing, since they will have learned that the best learning takes place in a community of scholars, who understand through cooperation (i.e., not by competing for grades, awards &c.). This will have the happy result of de-absolutizing (to use an ugly word) their own theological and ecclesiastical traditions.

The point is not that they should conclude, assert, or imply that these questions (and others like them) are relative or mere personal preference or comfort—the temptation to that particular apathy [care-lessness] will have been addressed again and again in their reading and perhaps even more pointedly when their writing is evaluated. They will understand instead that no single work of literature, theology, history, or philosophy (or any other field of study), contains the whole truth; that no one person, no matter how blessed with learning, insight, or understanding, is right in all that he or she asserts or denies; that no theological or ecclesiastical tradition has cornered the market on truth or depth of insight. Because this program fosters the conviction that truth is ubiquitous, connectional, and embedded in the fabric of the created order, they expect to find strengths and weaknesses in all communions, systems, and approaches to knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.

It means also, however, that they will expect to discover the connections within and throughout creation, that they expect to see and to realize the interdependence of the entire Church, that they therefore rejoice in the contributions made by their own tradition, but that they rejoice as well in the contributions of other communions and schools of thought.

Preachers will understand that “their” sermons and ideas and interpretations are not the product of their individual insight, but the fruit of all of their conversations, reading, and even the apparently incidental events of their lives.[\[52\]](#)

Graduates should be good counselors, since effective counseling rests on the ability to listen (below). They should also be able to lead and direct others, as those around them realize that they are being heard and understood—in a word, that they are being taken seriously, which should make them more careful listeners and speakers in their turn, with a rippling effect that works through the entire community.

In other words, ministers and pastors who see and present themselves as fellow learners, and their sermons and other forms of ministry as opportunities for conversation, and whose lives model the humility before God, the text, and others that they learn through this pedagogy will—by the grace of God and the example of their lives—begin to change the patterns of life in the church, and thereby the work of the church in the world.

2. Specific Ministries

The minister who has learned first to listen, then to understand, and [only] then to tender that understanding to others for their response will be a better exegete and interpreter of Scripture. The minister reading theology or history who has learned to seek clarity when reading or studying—and who has developed the perseverance to work toward, and the patience to wait for, that insight—will grow into a better theologian or historian. The pastor who listens to, and seeks to understand the hearts of, a congregation will become more compassionate and therefore better able to minister, whether as preacher, counselor, or leader.[\[53\]](#)

Does this pedagogy guarantee such an outcome? Of course not. No program can.

If, however, this pedagogy is not merely a matter of institutional record, an official statement buried in a file or document somewhere, but is instead continually discussed, practiced, and explained by and before the school's constituencies as the justification for yet *another* school; if students enter the program understanding not only the mechanics of the seminar format, but the rationale underlying that pedagogical choice; and if its implementation is part of the ongoing faculty conversation (and the major factor in awarding tenure)—if these factors are present, then the student (who knows even before applying for admission that chief among the programmatic goals and purposes is cultivating a listening heart) is most likely to graduate with these values firmly planted, to be increasingly realized in his or her life.

Now, at this point, it might be helpful to ask how students will learn the skills of, for example, counseling and preaching, since this curriculum lacks a course in “practical [pastoral] theology.

First, with regard to preaching, the third-year course in rhetoric gives students opportunities to speak “in public”, with the benefit of immediately learning what others heard them say. In addition to this one-semester course, the skills required for preparing a sermon closely parallel those entailed in writing an essay—the ability to focus, organize, and present

one's thoughts so that others understand what is being communicated—skills that are fostered across and throughout the curriculum.

Secondly, with regard to counseling, professional counselors and psychotherapists view listening as *the* crucial counseling skill.^[54] The director of a seminary-based counseling program once told me that his main goal in the “Introduction to Counseling” course was to convince students that their primary responsibility as counselors was to listen rather than to talk.

The same answer applies to questions about leading meetings, chairing boards or committees, and even reading a church budget. The primary requirement in all of these is the ability to listen to and the willingness to learn from others.

3. Churches

At the end of a week-long college-level seminar on reading biblical poetry, during which we had spent about thirty hours together in class, discussing biblical and non-biblical poems, a student asked about one of the images in a psalm that we were studying. After we discussed its interpretation for a few minutes he said “This has been great, this week together. But now we have to go back to our schools and do it on our own, without *you* to help us. How can we know that we're getting it right?” After a brief disclaimer about “getting it right”, I daydreamed aloud:

What if in the church every member were encouraged to discover and follow his or her own interest and “bent”, so that this person pursued his interest in history, and that person her study of philosophy, or another “dug into” liturgics, or historical theology, or physics, or music, or whatever subject most interested each one.

This is possible when the leader(s) of the church understand that everything—every aspect of creation—has permanent, or eternal, value; disciplined study of anything, therefore, ultimately strengthens the life of the believing community.

Furthermore, what if this were done, not primarily for the emotional wellbeing of the individual church member, but because each person were expected to bring the fruits of his or her study and reflection to bear on questions that arose in the church. A discussion about a new movie, e.g., might elicit comments about its underlying view of existence and life, or remarks about its historical validity, or how the score undermined its “message”.

On the other hand, everyone would soon know who understood what, and that understanding would bless the entire group as it was shared. When you were reading a biblical poem, you could turn to the person who

loves poetry and has studied poems and their interpretation for years, as well as someone who has studied biblical poems in Hebrew, in translation, and in light of their poetic nature.

What, in other words, if an entire church functioned as a body in which each part sought to be the best it could be at what it did for the good of the entire body, because its leaders modeled and encouraged such an understanding of their life together, and of their ministry toward their neighbours and the world?

There was a moment's silence, then the student who had raised the question said—to murmurs of agreement—”Whew! That sure is attractive!”, and the group asked “Where can we find churches like that?”

If the approach to theological and ministerial education outlined in this paper were realized, we would see a change in every aspect of the church's life, from our understanding of the ministry, of the pastorate, of the nature of the sermon, of the purpose of Christian education, and of the nature of church governance (regardless of polity); we could reasonably expect the conversational tone and level of the entire congregation—including the manner of decision-making discussions on boards, committees, sessions, consistories, &c.—to rise under such a ministerial pattern.

Pastors or ministers who comes through a theological education established upon a pedagogy of humility, in which they encounter the fundamental and primal issues of Christianity and the life of the faithful as they have been set forth by the greatest thinkers, and in which they wrestle with those ideas alone, with others, in conversation and in writing, and in which they confront the simple reality that no one can learn, know, or even begin to understand all things—such leaders will be far more likely to see their ministry as furthering such a local church because they themselves have seen the benefit and blessing of growing by learning together.

V. CONVICTIONS

In this approach to theological education we seek to join—and then to minister out of—the eternal conversation about the things of God, including his works of creation, providence, redemption, and renewal, reflecting fundamental convictions that arise from its identity as a Christian program:

1. That the *God* who reveals himself in and through the *Bible*, and throughout his *creation*, exists in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that *all things* exist in and through and because of him, and that by virtue of their creation all things entail divine revelation as part of their nature.
2. That the harmonious relationship within the Godhead implies that existence is fundamentally communal and relational, including human beings, and that knowledge and understanding are most effectively pursued relationally, i.e., in conversation with those around us, as well as with those who have preceded us.

Since existence—the order of creation—is fundamentally communal, ecological, and symbiotic, life and learning are (or ought also to be) communal, cooperative, and holistic, incarnating the image of the Church as a body made up of many members, each supplying its own part to the function and well-being of the whole.

3. That the *fundamental Christian metaphysic* is that **goodness** depends on our ability to discern the **truth**, and that this ability begins when we recognize, confess, and rejoice in that which is as that which is **real**.[\[55\]](#)
4. That the *most important ideas*, expressed in the *best words*, are most worthy of our time and attention.
5. That the best learning is that done in and with the fellowship of others, whose understanding sharpens and refines our own, and to whose understanding our own contributes, so that we see the task of learning of one of learning *together*, both for and from each other.
6. That we gather around the greatest texts in order to focus our thoughts and conversations on the most important ideas, and in order to learn from their authors by helping each other understand their ideas and the implications of those ideas.

7. That we truly learn only those things that we love, which means that true learning is a matter of the heart; and that the process of reading, discerning, discussing, and writing—with and for one another *coram Deo*—fosters true learning.
8. That *ministry is life*; they cannot be separated. That which prepares us to live therefore best prepares us for ministry.
9. That our goal, therefore, is to join the age-long convivium around the things of God, that we may minister out of our participation in the eternal conversation about reality, truth, and goodness by the light of Christ, through whom all things have come to pass, and in whom and for whom they and we exist.

Frederic Clarke Putnam

Hatfield, Pennsylvania

Lent MMVII/Ascension MMVIII

PRELIMINARY READING LIST

Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*

The Apostolic Fathers

Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologica**

Aristotle*

Augustine, *Confessions*; *The City of God*

Bach, *Cantata 140* (“Wachet auf”), *St. Matthew Passion*

Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics**

Bede the Venerable, *History ...*

Bible (Genesis 1 – Revelation 22)

Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*

Brahms, Johannes, *Eine Deutsches Requiem*

Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

Chesterton (varia)*

Chrysostom*

Donne, John, assorted poems, prose

Edwards, Jonathan, *The Freedom of the Will; “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”*

Eusebius, *History of the Early Church*

Gregory Nazianzus*

Gregory of Nyssa*

Handel, George, *Israel in Egypt; Samson; Messiah; Judas Maccabeus*

Heidelberg Catechism

Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*

Josephus, *Antiquities; Jewish Wars*

Luther, Martin, *The Bondage of the Will*

Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*

Mendelssohn, Felix, *Elijah*

Montaigne, *Essays**

Mozart, Wolfgang, *Requiem, Ave Verum Corpus* (varia)

Newman, John Henry Cardinal, *The Idea of a University*

Newton, *Letters**

Pascal, Blaise, *Pensées*

Pieper, Josef, *Josef Pieper: An Anthology*; works*

Plotinus*

Plutarch, *Lives**

Plato, dialogues*

Pseudo-Dionysus the Aeropagite, *On the Divine Names*

Ratzinger, *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church**

Seneca, *De Senectute*

Sertillanges, A. G., *The Intellectual Life*

Thucydides, *Peloponnesian Wars*

Trent, Council of, documents*

Westminster *Confession of Faith, Larger Catechism, Shorter Catechism*

* indicates selections

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[1] These are also distinctives of the curriculum of several colleges, e.g., St. John's College (Annapolis, MD & Santa Fe, NM), Thomas Aquinas College (Santa Paul, CA), Shimer College (Chicago, IL).

[2] Canonical and chronological divisions are approximate.

[3] Not all of these means, outcomes, and values are unique to this proposal; what is "new" is its combination of curricular outline, textual sources, and pedagogy.

[4] This proposal does not suggest that the traditional model of theological be discarded; it does suggest the possibility of a school that presents a distinct and real alternative to that model.

[5] A number of people have commented on and asked questions about this paper, for which I thank them; any blame is mine.

[6] No one associated with these schools has been involved in writing this paper, nor does this reference imply their awareness or endorsement of this paper or any of its contents; their websites and printed literature reveal my indebtedness.

[7] I have mentally thanked J. Randall Peterson many times in the decades since he introduced me to this poem, and am delighted to do so in print. The poem was first published in *Bells in Winter* (Milosz 1981).

[8] Although these languages are generally referred to as "biblical" or "Old/New Testament" languages, each arose out of, was embedded within, and contributed to its respective cultural milieu. Far from being "biblical" languages, they were common human tongues that were used to write the biblical documents because they were the languages in which their human authors naturally communicated.

[9] Other goals include the ability to use resources based on the original text, and to interact with English versions and other translations.

[10] Hence the term "Biblical", rather than "New Testament", Greek. The Septuagint helps us study the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. As the oldest translation of the Hebrew text it implicitly "comments" on that text. The apostles often cite it, rather than rendering the Hebrew into Greek, and their vocabulary often reveals their familiarity with its language. Reading the LXX ought therefore to be a matter of course, not an arcane subject reserved for the linguistically or textually curious. See Jobes & Silva 2000.

[11] Basic lexical competence entails amassing a working vocabulary of about one thousand (1000) words; this is the goal in studying both languages.

[12] This is true even when we do not understand the function of every one of those parts. Linguistic competence also suggests that study should emphasize those aspects of a language that are both more frequent and that have more clearly defined functions, rather than treat, e.g., all verbal conjugations as though they were equally important.

[13] For an example of this, see the Hebrew grammar posted on-line at www.fredputnam.org.

[14]Papers might, e.g., compare one or more published translations with the Hebrew or Greek text in order to discuss the validity of various renderings, study the function of a particular word or form, explore a semantic range or cluster, or reflect on the structure, meaning, and significance of a passage.

[15]Two seminars per week for six fifteen-week semesters.

[16]The canonical text is divided into these reading assignments, which vary in length, based on literary or topical boundaries (or both); they are uniform across the institution (e.g., all second-year students discuss the same portion of Scripture on the same date).

[17]Along with the Old Testament, students read works from the ancient Near East [ANE]; before discussing the New Testament, they read “intertestamental” or “Second Temple” materials in order better to appreciate the Bible’s cultural context.

[18]The faculties of different schools might choose different sequences of readings, e.g., a purely canonical approach (Genesis – the Revelation), or a “chronological” approach (reading, e.g., the prophets alongside the historical books, the gospels as a harmony, or [some of] the epistles “within” the book of Acts). These decisions are not ultimately as important as having an institutionally unified approach, since that is what will foster “extra-curricular” conversation and extended discussion.

[19]This also accomplishes a pastoral goal of this program (“Outcomes”, below).

[20]This formulation comes from Schall (2005, *passim*), reflecting Pieper.

[21]The influence of Plotinus’ “brand” of neo-Platonism is another example.

[22]Dorothy L. Sayers was once asked if the four actors who portrayed the archangels in *The Zeal of They House* were chosen for their piety. She said that they were most likely chosen for their physical appearance, strength, and dramatic ability; piety was an accidental side benefit, rather than a consideration in casting, although she did admit that an actor might be chosen because he was “known to be dependable” (1999, 108-10).

[23]Because music is so closely associated with worship, discussions in this course also include such topics as worship, liturgy, church architecture, &c.

[24]Much of the classical writings critique “rhetoric” as manipulative and self-serving (e.g., Plato’s *Gorgias*). Students discuss the relationship between truth and speech (words) and the proper use of language in communication. For a series of extended discussions about classical rhetoric, see Kennedy (Porter 1997, 1-42); on the relationship between reality, truth, and language, see Pieper 1992.

[25]This description reflects my own ecclesiastical background; it may be less applicable to those in other communions.

[26] Canonical and chronological divisions are approximate.

[27] In biblical studies, for example, the statement that a particular word or grammatical function “means” thus-and-so means merely that someone (or, more probably, many people) have found thus-and-so to be a valid explanation for the “meaning” of that word or grammatical function. In the same way, the historical claim that this person or that did or did not do or say something reflects the experience of researching the experiences of others; the closer those others were to the supposed origin of the event or saying, the greater the validity that we reckon to the claim.

[28] Society at large is not only hostile to the idea of the unity of knowledge, but decries the Christian claim that reality can be known and confessed. By experience and precept our culture teaches us that “education” entails learning randomly concatenated ideas and “facts”, and that individual subjects and ideas are just that—individual and autonomous.

[29] After writing this essay, I discovered Susan M. Simonaitis’s helpful discussion, “Teaching as Conversation” (Jones & Paulsell 2002, 99-119).

[30] Simonaitis describes what she calls “generative lectures” and “structured improvisation” as conversational alternatives to traditional lectures (2002, 115); neither apply to this pedagogy.

[31] The terminology’s importance lies in its signal to everyone—especially to students and faculty—that this is not a case of classes “as usual”, but that faculty play a different rôle in this school.

[32] After writing this paper, I discovered that American “philanthropist Edward Harkness challenged the faculty [at Philips Exeter Academy] to create an innovative way of teaching. He described his idea as follows: ‘*What I have in mind is (a classroom) where (students) could sit around a table with a teacher who would talk with them, and instruct them by a sort of tutorial or conference method, where (each student) would feel encouraged to speak up. This would be a real revolution in methods.*’” *The Harkness Table (as it came to be called) is designed to promote this manner of education. My thanks to my colleague Chris Palladino for calling this to my attention.*

[33] Hoge & Wenger (2005, 39), cited by Witmer (2008, 245). They add “When comparing the five denominations in our study, we found Presbyterian pastors had higher rates of conflict with their congregations ... and, of the seven main reasons for leaving, this type of conflict was number one in frequency among Presbyterians” (p. 39).

[34] For a number of years the admissions department a well-known evangelical seminary said that about seven of every ten “inquirers” wanted to attend seminary so that they could become teachers (usually at a college or seminary), a number that did not vary more than one or two percent in either direction for more than a decade. Conversations with seminary students over many years convince me that this number may be low.

[35] Perhaps our metaphor does more harm than help. Calling ministers “pastors” or “under-shepherds” (as biblical as those terms may be) easily reinforces the idea that the shepherd—the minister—is the only person qualified to lead, guide, correct, &c., and implies that the people—the sheep—have no choice but to listen and obey. People, however, are not sheep; the metaphor, which is quite useful on the divine-human axis, may be less-than-helpful when we discuss the relationship between human beings.

[36]By the time they are reading the poetic books of Scripture, students will be translating portions of the passages that will be discussed in the “Bible” course.

[37]Although this pedagogy may appear to be “Socratic”, skimming any Platonic dialogue reveals that Socrates asks many questions, but it also reveals that his speeches tend to become longer and longer, and those of his opponents or students shorter and shorter, so that in any given “discussion” the “Socratic method” quickly becomes one of lecture punctuated by rhetorical questions which are posed to be answered, “Just so, Socrates” (or the like). Teaching is not therefore “Socratic” as that term is often [mis-]understood; the teacher does not merely pose “deep” questions for debate (see Strong (1996)).

[38]As long as the text lies open before the class, however, and everyone in the room realizes that they are there in order to pursue a clear understanding of that text, it is also the responsibility of each person to (eventually) ask how a comment or question relates to the text.

[39]The goal is *not* indoctrination, proselytization, or consensus, nor to affirm or confirm the “right” interpretation or meaning, nor to defend or establish a particular philosophical or theological system—nor even to privilege one reading over others—but rather to understand what was read.

[40]The academic “machine” requires a quantifiable academic record to satisfy requirements for ordination, further study, and transfer to other schools, but this would not be part of the student’s normal experience (i.e., no papers with grades on them would appear in a student’s mailbox). The purpose of vocabulary quizzes in “Language”, for example, would not be data for grading but to help students assess their progress.

[41]This latter requirement is the greatest challenge for those raised to be “professors”.

[42]Nor will tutors specialize in, e.g., the prophetic corpus, or medieval theology, or Greek participles.

[43]In order to prepare tutors for their initial encounters with a new subject, tutors with some experience with that subject would conduct seminars for other faculty, who participate as part of their tutorial function. These seminars would function exactly like those in which students participate.

I suspect that music and the biblical languages will be the areas of least experience and greatest challenge for many potential faculty, which means that the school must be prepared to bring them to the point of understanding sufficient to tutor students in those areas.

[44]Choice in seminary education is essentially limited to general theological orientation—Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox—and (perhaps especially within Protestantism) to a spectrum ranging from “avant-garde” or “liberal” to “evangelical”, “conservative”, or “fundamentalist”.

Comparing lists of required courses from those seminaries that would generally be considered, e.g., conservative or evangelical (those with which I am most familiar) reveals that the similarity of their programs offers little reason to choose one over the other, apart from non-academic factors such as location, reputation, and cost.

Different schools, or different degree programs within a school may require, e.g., two or three semesters of church history, or one or two semesters—or none—of Hebrew (most still require some Greek), alongside a

minimally varied set of courses on the Bible. The greatest variety may appear in the courses on theology (or doctrine) and ministerial practice, but there is little sign that any program *qua* program is sufficiently “unique” or “distinctive” to offer a genuine alternative.

[45] A well-known and beloved modern work of “popular” theology is *The Knowledge of the Holy*, by A. W. Tozer. What is perhaps less known is his motive for writing it. In the preface he says:

Were Christians today reading such works as those of Augustine or Anselm a book like this would have no reason for being. But such illuminated masters are known to modern Christians only by name. Publishers dutifully reprint their books and in time these appear on the shelves of our studies. But the whole trouble lies right there: they remain on the shelves. The current religious mood makes the reading of them virtually impossible even for educated Christians. (1961, ix).

[46] Although the first semester of each biblical language and of music uses a “textbook” in the traditional sense; these are heavily text-oriented, so that students interact with the biblical and musical texts as quickly and as directly as possible.

[47] The phrase “instant classic” is not only oxymoronic, but self-refuting.

[48] For a further discussion of this point, see Lewis 1970.

[49] This program has many further implications, including the library’s collection policy (what are the implications of a focus on primary texts rather than on secondary and tertiary scholarship), and other facets of institutional life, such as chapel services and even the architecture of its buildings (which should provide places for informal conversation, reading, and study), but those go far beyond the scope of this paper, and would be addressed much more effectively by individual institutions.

[50] This is not “Know-Nothing-ism”—references and learned commentary have an important place. That place ought not be, however, as the court of first appeal.

[51] Some may suggest that the most important qualification for ministry is a person’s ability to proclaim Christ and the gospel? Considered in the abstract, without reference to a particular situation, the gospel is most certainly the wisest word, but it is only specifically wise when proclaimed to a listening (hearing) ear. If the hearer is not able or disposed to respond—i.e., if the listener does not “hear”—then proclamation is futile, and may even be damaging: wisdom is useless or even dangerous to fools (Pr 26.7, 9), just as light increases responsibility whether or not the eyes remain blind (Lk 11.29-36).

[52] “M. Pascal used to say of those authors who always refer to their works as ‘My book, my commentary, my history, etc.’, that they sound like solid citizens with a place of their own, always talking about ‘my house’. They would do better, this excellent man added, to say: ‘Our book, our commentary, our history, etc.’, considering that there is usually more of other people’s property in it than their own.” (Pascal 1966, 330). This should be the attitude of every person who understands that all of existence is connected and interdependent (apart from Pascal’s rather gratuitous slap at the middle class).

[53]The word “better” here has a twofold sense: (1) better than he or she would have been without such training; and (2) better than the minister whose goal is merely to confirm conclusions already reached or convictions already held, i.e., better than the person who is convinced beforehand that the answer or solution need only be demonstrated or explained. Better than those who (in other words) cannot hear.

[54]I have discussed this with several practicing psychotherapists, who have assured me of this point (private conversations).

[55]See Josef Pieper, *Josef Pieper: An Anthology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 54.