

Place, Power, and People in Twenty-first Century Theological Education

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Since the turn of this century, there has been a surge of scholarly energies given over to rethinking theological education in a wide range of directions. Indeed, expansions on the singular model of the residential seminary have been explored with sustained energy for a large part of the last thirty years to the degree that there is now a good body of experience to reflect upon how well satellite campuses, new degree or certificate programs, and distance learning coupled with intensive residential sessions have thrived.¹ A wide range of cases have been made for ways that theological education might re-focus its pedagogical attention: online instruction;² engagement of the local church as an authentic partner in theological education;³ project-based learning;⁴ outcome-based pedagogies;⁵ and moves to incorporate more contextually applied skills into curricula such as organizational leadership, conflict resolution, and personal growth.⁶ Through these developments, leaders of institutions of theological

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¹ See Glenn T. Miller, "Does a Secular Age Need the Seminary? Considerations on Alternative Forms of Ministerial Preparation," *Theological Education* 46, no. 2 (2011): 49.

² See Dan Ulrich, "Could Theological Education Be Better Online?" *Brethren Life and Thought* 55, nos. 3 and 4 (Summer/Fall 2010): 18–25.

³ Roland Spjuth, "Theological Education in a Context where the Church Lost its Body," *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 7, no. 2 (January 2007): 35; see also C. Franklin Granger, "Seminaries, Congregations, and Clergy: Lifelong Partners in Theological Education," *Theological Education* 46, no. 1 (2010): 87–99, and Daniel O. Aleshire, "The Future has Arrived: Changing Theological Education in a Changed World," *Theological Education* 46, no. 2 (2011): 74–75.

⁴ Robin J. Steinke, "Theological Education: A Theological Framework for Renewed Mission and Models," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 50, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 364.

⁵ See J. Eileen Scully, "Theological Education for the Anglican Communion: The Promises and Challenges of TEAC," *Anglican Theological Review* 90, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 207.

⁶ Miller, "Does a Secular Age Need the Seminary?" 52.

education have continued to work in creative ways to balance the needs of the academy with the needs of communities of faith, and those of the public square.⁷

Yet, for all of this innovation it can be argued that many current institutional practices in the global north have their feet planted on two sides of history at once. On the one hand, the residential seminary and its Master of Divinity program (or its equivalents) still hold sway as the “gold standards.” On the other hand, with each move made to expand the frame of reference for theological education, what has commonly been understood to constitute such an education is reinscribed. The extent to which theological education can successfully split the difference remains an open question. In this essay, I seek to probe this open question by exploring a possible realignment of theological education around three pivotal concepts: place, power, and people.

Place

Despite the considerable longevity of many institutions of theological education, it has been argued that such entities remain somewhat hidden from the landscape of public life.⁸ The traditional mode of Anglican formation for ordained ministry, for instance, has been the cloistered residential setting. Such settings have not been particularly effective in operating porous boundaries between the world and the institution inside the seminary walls, somewhat insulating students from the life of the world beyond. It is hardly surprising that leaders of such institutions voice concern that theological education needs to be more culturally literate in a globalized society.⁹ It is also unsurprising that when such a model of formation for ordained ministry is exported abroad, bodies like the Anglican Primates Working Party on Theological Education name a concern over “inadequate engagement with contemporary thinking, culture, and society” in current theological education across the Anglican Communion.¹⁰

⁷ See Alice Hunt, “Waiting for a Divine Bailout: Theological Education for Today and Tomorrow,” *Theological Education* 46, no. 2 (2011): 65.

⁸ James L. Waits, “Looking Forward, Looking Backward: A View of Theological Education at the Beginning of a New Millennium,” *Theological Education* 36, no. 2 (2000): 50.

⁹ Ian S. Markham, “Theological Education in the Twenty-first Century,” *Anglican Theological Review* 92, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 163.

¹⁰ Scully, “Theological Education for the Anglican Communion,” 203.

Place matters. The kind of space for engagement with the world that future leaders of churches are formed within, matters. David Pfrimmer has made the case that theological schools need to engage a diversity of “publics” in civic life.¹¹ Yet how might places for theological education that have developed largely in intentional isolation become spaces for commonality with wider society? And how might a culture of formation for ministry be nurtured that recognizes and values that commonality? Various answers to this challenge of opening up the space for theological education to the world beyond have been made. With regards to curriculum, the Scandinavian Academy of Leadership and Theology (SALT) project has sought to develop a maximal level of interaction between academy and congregation via an integrated curriculum, based on problem solving–styled learning and assessments wherein students are examined in their application of knowledge to one concrete congregationally-situated scenario.¹² Along a similar vein, Robin Steinke has argued for a recasting of theological education to be seen as an apprenticeship that intentionally integrates study and life in the world.¹³ Franklin Granger has offered a specific model for such an integration through a “Congregational Engagement” approach to curriculum, drawing from the Community Engagement model of education from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT) that promotes a two-way interaction between the academy and the local community.¹⁴

Developments such as these may strengthen the relationships between church and seminary in a number of lively and life-giving ways, a need that has been stated by numerous scholars over the past decade.¹⁵ Yet, it is not as clear how much the public place of institutions of theological education will be impacted by such curricular advances other than to locate ministers in formation less opaquely in

¹¹ David Pfrimmer, “Developing a Public Hermeneutic for the Future of Theological Education?” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 50, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 370.

¹² Spjuth, “Theological Education in a Context where the Church Lost its Body,” 36.

¹³ Steinke, “Theological Education,” 364.

¹⁴ Granger, “Seminaries, Congregations, and Clergy,” 92.

¹⁵ See Waits, “Looking Forward, Looking Backward,” 53; Spjuth, “Theological Education in a Context where the Church Lost its Body,” 33; Aleshire, “The Future has Arrived,” 74–75; Darren Cronshaw, “Reenvisioning Theological Education, Mission and the Local Church,” *Mission Studies* 28, no. 1 (2011): 109; Donn F. Morgan, “As Through a Glass Darkly: Defining Theological Education in the Twenty-First Century,” *Anglican Theological Review* 90, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 259.

the world. A more incisive development that has been suggested is for faculty of institutions of theological education to have a more public role in society. There has been encouragement for scholars in such institutions to voice views with regards to justice, equal opportunity, and matters concerning the common good.¹⁶

To envision theological education as taking place in a more open space where boundaries begin to dissolve is to imagine the seminary less as a place for preparation for service in the world and more as a space for gathering that world within institutions of theological education. Len Hjalmarson's vision for such a place for theological education is presented as a hybrid of the Celtic monastery and the Indian ashram.¹⁷ Unlike the cloistered community, the Celtic monastery is a space that is open to the public and often built at major crossroads; in emphasizing hospitality, it exists at the confluence of secular and Christian culture. The ashram is similarly located "in the world," without fences and open to all.¹⁸ Indeed, Kraig Klaudt has argued that for the ashram, being in the world "is inseparable from the world being with us."¹⁹ Yet, it is not merely the ashram's open hospitality that enables it to have a spaciousness for the world, it is also its appreciation of the teaching relationship. Tagore, in founding the ashram Shanti Niketan outside of Kolkata, subverted the distinction between teacher and learner, stating that all are learners together. Such a vision is much like Henri Nouwen's notion of the teaching space as a space where "students and teachers can enter into a fearless communication with each other and allow their respective life experiences to be their primary and most valuable source of growth and maturation. It asks for a mutual trust in which those who teach and those who want to learn can become present to each other."²⁰

What these visions suggest is a recasting of the Victorian seminary space in favor of theological education that intentionally hybridizes the life of church and world into a "Third Space" of formation, relational encounter, and communal gathering. Drawing from the

¹⁶ Waits, "Looking Forward, Looking Backward," 50.

¹⁷ Len Hjalmarson, "Toward a Missional Spirituality in the Academy," *Direction* 42, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 38–54.

¹⁸ Hjalmarson, "Toward a Missional Spirituality in the Academy," 44–45.

¹⁹ Kraig Klaudt, "The Ashram as a Model for Theological Education," *Theological Education* 34, no. 1 (Autumn 1997): 30.

²⁰ Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 60.

work of Homi Bhabha and the wider world of postcolonial theory, to see the encounters we have with one another as taking place in a Third Space is to recast what it means to be in relationship with “the other.” Daniel Aleshire has argued that theological education needs to ready ministers to be able to deal seriously with questions people have about the “religious other.”²¹ Postcolonial theory extends this sentiment to suggest that ministers need to be formed within spaces that are characterized by the integration of the life of “the other” into daily life.

Such Third Space encounters are integrative in the formation of those who relate within them through the operation of what postcolonial thinkers call “hybridity,” understood as the “interdependence of persons in the dialogical relational encounter and the mutual construction of their subjectivities.”²² As these encounters occur they leave a “resistant trace,” a “stain” of the subject being encountered.²³ In other words, encounters in Third Space hybridize those who encounter within it such that each leaves the relational encounter with a little of the irreducible particularity of “the other.”

To apply these concepts to practical realities, the concern voiced that ministers in formation need to be more culturally literate in a globalized society²⁴ could be met with the opening up of places that host theological education to a polyphony of partners in that formation. Such partners might include leaders and practitioners of other faiths; people representative of issues pertaining to specific globalized identity-issues such as ethnicity, gender, socio-economic inequalities, and sexual orientation; local community leaders; local community users of seminary spaces for community gardens, community organizing, advocacy groups, support groups, and so on. Institutions of theological education could also integrate into curricula and formative experiences the engagement of students in local civic issues and invite the community into the seminary space through a diversity of classes for seminarians and community members alike.

The possibilities for authentic partnering with the local context in the creation of a Third Space for learning and formation are endless.

²¹ Aleshire, “The Future has Arrived,” 74.

²² Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 118.

²³ Homi Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory,” in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 49.

²⁴ Markham, “Theological Education in the Twenty-first Century,” 163.

Such places of formation could indeed emulate the Celtic monastery/ashram space for community that situates itself at the crossroads of contemporary life in an intentionally non-cloistered manner. Seminaries would no longer be places set apart from local contexts but communities placed within local communities. Yet, for all of the possibilities for a polyphonic formation for ministry such places of theological education might open up, the real work of such integration in the learning experience of ministerial formation will not occur unless the role of power in our global culture is appreciated and responded to.

Power

It is only by contextualizing the lived experiences of those “on the margins” that theological students and their teachers can begin to problematize the information with which they are confronted, by asking critical questions and by challenging simple answers to what are always complex and highly politicized issues (especially those having to do with economic injustice, educational failure, political disenfranchisement, and so on).²⁵

What might it mean for students of institutions of theological education in the global north to develop a robust critical consciousness of and within the power dynamics of the global village? Put another way, how might theological education “rigorously focus on the impossible work of empathy”?²⁶ Empathy, here, might be understood as the attempt to dissolve “those pernicious binaries of church and state, public and private, and culture and religion, saturated as they are with race, class, and gender exclusivist logics,”²⁷ and to immerse oneself in the world of the other in an attempt to avoid the binarism that created the polarities of society in the first place.

Jenny Te Paa has made the case for such an approach as “bicultural theological education” that is committed to “seeing the world and its multiple concerns from more than one viewpoint,” such that students do not shrink “from exposing the global forces at work to

²⁵ Jenny Plane Te Paa, “How Diverse is Contemporary Theological Education? Identity Politics and Theological Education,” *Anglican Theological Review* 90, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 236.

²⁶ Susan Abraham, “What Does Mumbai Have to Do with Rome? Postcolonial Perspectives on Globalization and Theology,” *Theological Studies* 69 (May 2008): 389–390.

²⁷ Abraham, “What Does Mumbai Have to Do with Rome?” 391.

suppress, limit, and even remove the life chances of the weakest or most vulnerable among us.”²⁸ Indeed, for Anglicans, as members of a worldwide Communion, there cannot be the hope in the global north to have authentic and life-giving relationship with the multiplicity of identities in the global south until such a bi- or indeed multicultural critical consciousness is valued and nurtured in the future leaders of churches of both hemispheres of the globe.

To cultivate such a critical consciousness might require the discovery of a vocation of “disruption.” Again, to draw from postcolonial theory, the praxis of hybridity might be seen as a strategically potent tool for such ministerial formation that takes the form of the “negotiation in between polarities of power, exposing and exploiting the space that difference opens up.”²⁹ This work might be seen as a vocation of disruption that questions and opens up assumptions of hegemonic and homogenous ideologies taking place between the polarities of gender, economic status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political alignment, and so on.

Yet, not only is the development of a critical consciousness in relation to power dynamics essential for church leaders, a critical theological consciousness is equally essential. Susan Abraham has characterized theological production “as a site tainted by power differentials.”³⁰ It could be argued further that without an awareness of the role of power differentials in the production of theological claims the church is in danger of colluding with the very disenfranchising powers that it seeks to critique and resist. However, if the development of such a theological critical consciousness is seen as essential to the lifelong formation of the ministers of the church, then it is possible to see a future church where such ministers could offer a gradual rearticulation of their inherited theological tradition and offer a power-aware critique of the same. In other words, the minister as postcolonial practitioner–theologian might then be seen as a participant in an unending renegotiation that sees the teaching of the church as a continual work in progress rather than a fixed and stable tradition.

It might well be the case, here, that fellow Anglicans reading this essay will be thinking that Anglicanism already has inherent within its culture and polity a considerable room for interpretative difference.

²⁸ Te Paa, “How Diverse is Contemporary Theological Education?” 236.

²⁹ Abraham, “What Does Mumbai Have to Do with Rome?” 381.

³⁰ Abraham, “What Does Mumbai Have to Do with Rome?” 377.

Indeed, a *via media* can only truly be a middle space for theologizing if there is a spaciousness retained within that middle for enough sides of the theological coin to be represented. Yet, as something of a hypothetical counter to such a celebratory claim for Anglicanism, it can equally be argued that the supposed spaciousness of the Anglican Communion today is severely attenuated by either an easy reconciliation of difference or, in contradiction to the *via media*, a strident opposition to it. For instance, I would contend that the apparent ease by which constituents of the global Communion have ruptured relationship with one another over issues of human sexuality and theological and ecclesiastical authority is symptomatic of a web of relationships in Anglicanism that has become conditioned to the profound impatience for quick resolution that in so many ways characterizes the psyche of a consumer society.

One advantage of postcolonial theory as a dialogue partner for the conversation about the future of theological education is that it does not invite easy reconciliation. Within the praxis of postcolonial power, the work of living into critically conscious relationships occurs by incremental and slight alterations to hegemonic discourse. Indeed, Homi Bhabha has argued that such slight alterations are “often the most significant elements in a process of subversion and transformation.”³¹ Such slight alterations occur on an ongoing basis, such that reconciliation is seen as a lifelong endeavor rather than an achievable goal in the short term.

How, then, might a more subtle *via media*, a more power-aware space for difference be cultivated in the praxis of theological education? It turns out that current thinking about the future of theological education offers some shoots of hope in that direction which in themselves might be seen as slight yet potentially deeply transformational alterations to current practices, particularly in the global north. For instance, those leaders in education who are responsible for shaping the culture of institutions of theological education have been encouraged to cultivate “a space where people can express their fears and anxieties about change and leadership.”³² Indeed, it has been argued

³¹ W. J. T. Mitchell, “Translator Translated: Interview with Cultural Theorist Homi Bhabha,” *Artforum* 33, no. 7 (March 1995): 82.

³² Hjalmarson, “Toward a Missional Spirituality in the Academy,” 47.

that ministers in formation and the church they are being prepared to serve are in real need of embracing an openness to talk about failure.³³

In terms of pedagogy, one of the more recent possibilities for such a culture of difference is in the ever-burgeoning technologies of the digital age. Dan Ulrich has argued that one of the benefits of the integrated use of technology in instruction alongside face-to-face learning is the dispersion of power that the online classroom enables, where students may take the conversation in unanticipated directions often more freely than they can in person. Moreover, the online classroom space is particularly encouraging for more introverted students to play a greater role in classroom discussion.³⁴ Online learning is also seen to improve access for people whose circumstances do not allow them to attend traditional theological schools, whether for reasons to do with economic status, geographical location, linguistic barriers, or something else.³⁵

If place and power are both pivotal concepts to ponder in this era of rethinking theological education, then a third “p”—people—completes this essay’s triangle by raising one of the most fundamental questions the future of theological education faces: whom is theological education for?

People

Speaking from a Scandinavian context for church life, Roland Spjuth has contended that in a secular society theology is no longer understood as a holistic interpretation of life. Consequently, the church is seen as concerned with something other than economics, social issues, or politics, and more as a fellowship of people who deal solely with spiritual matters.³⁶ The church, thus, becomes disembodied from its context and from the lived reality of individual and corporate life, seen to be a retreat from the world offering tools for spiritual survival in a secular society, or a hobby or club for the religiously inclined.³⁷

³³ William H. Willimon, “Making Ministry Difficult: The Goal of Seminary,” *The Christian Century* (February 4, 2013): 12.

³⁴ Ulrich, “Could Theological Education Be Better Online?” 20.

³⁵ Ulrich, “Could Theological Education Be Better Online?” 21.

³⁶ Spjuth, “Theological Education in a Context where the Church Lost its Body,” 31.

³⁷ Spjuth, “Theological Education in a Context where the Church Lost its Body,” 32.

If such a pattern of secularization is one that might reasonably be expected to become increasingly common across the global north, then the question of whom theological education is for must be brought into sharper relief. For a couple of centuries, theological education for ministry has invested financially and culturally in a model that places a massively disproportionate amount of resources into the individual, soon-to-be-ordained minister. The implication of this model is that the goal of theological education is to fit individuals for the life of ordained ministry because this best serves the mission of the church.

However, if the *raison d'être* of theological education in the church is to best fit it for its current missional situation, then it can be argued that increasingly secular societies will require a much more diversified use of resources. In this vein, if the future vitality of the church is to become the work of lay and ordained leaders, then this will need to be reflected in the priorities of theological education, such that institutions of learning might open up their resources to the body of the church much more effectively. Such a shift in the practice and culture of theological education may require what Pfrimmer envisions of ministry as an “active accompaniment with theological learning built more on collaboration and less on individual competition.”³⁸

Building upon this notion of the mutual “active accompaniment” of the ministry of the church and theological education, how might it look to reimagine the scope of theological education even further, not only to be of service to the lay and ordained leaders of the church but to be of direct service to the public at large? That is, what might it be like to imagine centers of theological scholarship and learning as open source spaces for learning and growth for any who may wish to explore theological questions? Such questions for theological education are resonant with the missional church movement that seeks to free church ministry from anxiety about institutional survival or longevity because the paradigm of “build it and they will come”—for so long the attractional model of mission that Pfrimmer argues has been as true of seminaries as it has been of churches³⁹—is replaced by an

³⁸ Pfrimmer, “Developing a Public Hermeneutic for the Future of Theological Education?” 371.

³⁹ Pfrimmer, “Developing a Public Hermeneutic for the Future of Theological Education?” 369.

outward-moving paradigm where the church goes into the world to join the Spirit's work already being done there.

To explore this possibility of a more open source and missional form of theological education, I offer the first steps of one such missional model from my own corner of the Anglican Communion in the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego, California. Through the course of the past several years conversation has been bubbling up in the diocese that expressed hopes that we might develop local opportunities for theological education suited as best they could be to the context for mission that Anglicanism in this part of the world is situated within, a context that in many ways is of a "borderland." Geographically located on the border of Mexico, San Diego is in itself a liminal space, for despite the stringency of border controls, everyday life in the city integrates a range of people making their way to and from the south. Yet this integration on the northern side of the border is limited by the realities of economic disparity between San Diego and Tijuana. From a postcolonial perspective, life set along a somewhat porous border hybridizes relational encounters as the traces of the profound power differentials that exist between north and south remain, undercutting the tall tale of happy coexistence in the global village. Indeed, every gardener, cleaner, and construction worker—whether documented or not—who makes their way daily from south to north is a reminder to the Episcopal Church in San Diego of its baptismal mission to strive for justice and peace among all people.

Ministry within a borderland as a motif for mission is also paradigmatic of the economic disparities of the area. On the one hand, San Diego is home to ocean-view multimillion-dollar properties, and a large professional class that has come from other places across the United States. On the other hand, for the size of the overall population, San Diego has a disproportionately large homeless population, found by HUD (Department of Housing and Urban Development) to be one of five cities in the U.S. that account for twenty percent of the homeless people in the nation.⁴⁰

In pondering the place for a new institution for theological education in the diocese, these considerations of how theological education might be situated within such a borderland played a pivotal role

⁴⁰ *The 2012 Point-in-Time Estimates of Homelessness*, Volume 1 of the 2012 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development, 6.

in the formation of a new diocesan “School for Ministry” that was launched in the fall of 2013. The location that was chosen was in itself a hybridized space. The campus of the School for Ministry is housed within what is called the Episcopal Church Center on the property of a former Episcopal church whose congregation had split from the diocese a few years before. On the site today, a remnant congregation still gathers and in the same space new liturgical expressions are explored in a diocesan “worship studio,” and thus the trace of the previous iteration of mission exists as new forms of church emerge around it. The place then is split between the past and the future. At the same time, the economic disparities of San Diego are writ large right on the sidewalk directly in front of the School for Ministry’s classroom space, with a sizeable local homeless and impoverished population gathering daily to engage the service ministries the Episcopal Church Center provides. In many ways, then, the School for Ministry is placed at a crossroads, in a borderland space for formation. Church past and future, people housed and homeless, each negotiate the power differentials that exist between one and the other. This is not a classroom set apart; it is juxtaposed at the street corner where poverty is not only visible but being engaged, as formation for ministries of service and the praxis of ministries of service occur simultaneously.

The “people” of the School coalesce around a model of a community of learning. The faculty is drawn from lay and ordained educators from across the diocese in a team-teaching approach that even in its first year has gathered over twenty teaching faculty to the School. Faculty, who are paid honorariums rather than salaries, are seen as a community within the wider diocesan community who offer their services to the School as part of their gift of service to the church. Such a model has enabled an expansion of the answer offered to the question of whom theological education is for from the perspective of teaching, as those who teach have found their own practice of ministry in the diocese beyond to be enriched and informed by their encounters in the classroom. The School’s pedagogical model sees the faculty member as a facilitator of the learning journey, co-navigating with students a shared space of intellectual encounter where theological difference is negotiated and students are formed not to master a knowledge-base as much as to cultivate the critical skills of a practitioner–theologian.

The student body currently comprises deacon and priest postulants who seek to live out their ordained life bi-vocationally. Alongside

them are individuals from across the diocese who are seeking to expand their own theological horizons either for the purpose of enriching their own ministries or for the sake of their own intellectual growth. Accessibility to the School for Ministry is maintained by a low fee structure, with provision for subsidized fees for individuals who cannot afford to pay as much. Beyond this, accessibility to learning is made possible by the fact that all course materials are freely available online.

Beyond faculty and students, an engagement with the wider public is sought out in a number of ways. Summer field placements for postulants situate learning in ministry settings that intentionally bring intellectual and spiritual formation into dialogue with issues of justice with regards to local refugee, mentally ill, homeless, and incarcerated populations. And beyond individuals preparing for ordained ministry, the School offers opportunities for theological education that reach out beyond the confines of categories of learning prescribed by ordination requirements and speak to the curiosity for theological questions that abound in the general public. Local coffee shops, online forums, and community focal points are seen as partners in an attempt to connect the School's community of learning to the local wider communities of San Diego.

Because the School has no significant overheads with no facilities of its own to maintain, and because it operates as a community of learning rather than within an institutional model with tenured faculty, the freedom to explore the questions of whom theological learning might be for *and with* is significant. Moreover, the adaptability of this model allows the gradual emergence of the School for Ministry to respond nimbly to the changing missional landscape before us. As it develops, the hope of the School is to move further and further out from its initial location at a busy thoroughfare in Ocean Beach, California, to partnerships for learning and growth that cross multiple borders: international ones to the south into Mexico, socio-economic ones to demographic groups the Episcopal Church historically has struggled to reach, and burgeoning segments of the population for whom the current structures of organized religion pose a barrier rather than an invitation to ponder the deep questions of life.

The vision my colleagues and I share for the School for Ministry is all rather utopian, no doubt—a brave new world of theological educational endeavor. There are many ways that the project already

falls short in missionally engaging the world around it. Yet, the impediments to the attempt to live into a missional model for theological education are not institutional nor financial; they are not tied to institutional survival nor to any set of preexistent vested interests. They are simply the challenges that face organized religion in twenty-first century America: people are moving on. People are decreasingly inclined to think of an institution of a mainline church as a source for spiritual growth and intellectual discovery. Indeed, as the rise of the not-religiously-affiliated illustrates, in the global north this is a challenge not only for theological education but for the church as a whole.⁴¹

Yet, with this challenge the future of theological education is brimming with possibilities for new expressions of how we might draw out talk about God from one another. The access to knowledge and to dialogue about that knowledge that the digital age continues to open up for segments of the population hitherto excluded from such discovery and debate is vast. While the future of the traditional residential seminary remains uncertain, beyond them the myriad of possibilities for theological learning and dialogue offer those who are interested in the long-term vitality of theological education great cause for hope, both within and beyond the classroom walls.

⁴¹ “Nones” on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation (Washington D.C.: The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2012), 9.