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ings. It would need to adopt a new attitude of intellectual humility—a certain willingness to submit to a vision of the whole that can be found only by living in the whole (theological) tradition.

Third, evangelical theologians need to beware the peculiarly academic sort of ambition that seeks acceptance and recognition by our liberal colleagues. We want their approval, and so we are tempted to write and teach what will be more consistent with the academy's moral and theological sensibilities. Or we seek the thrill of intellectual sophistication that is unencumbered by traditional formulations. But as Donald MacKinnon once observed and William Abraham has reminded us, the great orthodox creeds are the ordinary Christian's protection against the ingenuity of the wise and intellectually superior.<sup>36</sup>

These days the most common temptation is to disconnect moral theology from dogmatic theology, saying in neopietist fashion that doctrine and morality are finally unimportant as long as there are warm, fuzzy feelings about Jesus. Or we reduce Scripture to the human expression of religious experience, finding revelation somewhere other than in the biblical text itself. In the process, however, we have run roughshod over Scripture's claim for itself as '*words* taught not by human wis-

dom but by the Spirit' (1 Cor 2:13).<sup>37</sup>

I will go so far as to say that if evangelical theology does not adopt these suggestions, it will not survive. But it will strengthen itself and preserve itself against internal dissolution if it sees itself as a reform movement in the church catholic. The monastic movements, the Clunian reform movement, the Dominican preaching revival, the Franciscans, and the Reformation itself thrived and influenced the broader church by relating to and learning from the broader church. Only if evangelical theology sees itself as a renewal and reform movement raised up by the Spirit from amidst and for the purpose of the wider church catholic, and therefore learns from that universal church, will it save itself from disintegrating into even more subjectivist and individualistic sects, many of them neither evangelical nor orthodox.

Evangelicals have always put a premium on the local church. If they have talked about the universal church, typically they have thought only in terms of the universal church of fellow evangelicals. It is time for evangelicals to look more broadly, at the universal church beyond evangelical boundaries, not only around the world today, but especially to the last two thousand years of rich theological reflection.

<sup>37</sup> This is not an assertion that revelation is found only in Scripture, for the Tradition has had much to say about general revelation outside Scripture. But it is to say that Scripture is our normative guide when interpreted by the Great Tradition (which includes creeds and liturgy and the Fathers and the sacraments), and its revelation is in, with, and under its words.

## 'New Treasures With the Old': Addressing Culture and Gender Imperialism in Higher Level Theological Education

Perry W. H. Shaw

**KEYWORDS:** *Gender, curriculum, action research, relational learning, contextualisation, dialectics, logic, mind-mapping*

*He learned German, French, Greek, Latin, Hebrew, in addition to English, church history, systematics, homiletics, exegesis and pastoralia, as one part of the requirements for his degree. The other part, the dissertation, he wrote on some obscure theologian of the Middle Ages. Finally he got what he wanted: a Doctorate in Theology. It took him nine and a half years altogether, from the time he left his home until he passed his orals and set off to return.... At home relatives, neighbours, old friends... all gather to welcome him back... Dancing, jubilation, eating, feasting—all these go on as if there were nothing else to do, be-*

*cause the man for whom everyone had waited has finally returned. Suddenly there is a shriek. Someone has fallen to the ground. It is his older sister... he rushes to her. People make room for him and watch him. 'Let's take her to the hospital', he calls urgently. They are stunned. He becomes quiet. They all look at him bending over her. Why doesn't someone respond to his advice? Finally a schoolboy says, 'Sir, the nearest hospital is 50 miles away, and there are few buses that go there.' Someone else says, 'She is possessed. Hospitals will not cure her!' The Chief says to him, 'You have been studying theology overseas for 10 years. Now help your sister. She is troubled by the spirit of her great aunt.' He looks around. Slowly he goes to get Bultmann, looks at the index, finds what he wants, reads again about spirit possession in the New Testament. Of*

<sup>36</sup> D.M. MacKinnon, *The Church* (London: Dacre Press, 1940), 50; cited in William J. Abraham, 'Systematic Theology as Analytic Theology', in Oliver D. Crisp & Michael C. Rea, eds., *Analytic Theology: new essays in the philosophy of theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 57.

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course he gets the answer: Bultmann has demythologised it. He insists that his sister is not possessed. The people shout, 'Help your sister, she is possessed!' He shouts back, 'But Bultmann has demythologised demon possession.'<sup>1</sup>

John Mbiti narrated this story 35 years ago to illustrate the cultural irrelevance of much western theological education for the now-majority non-western Christian world. Thankfully, in the years since then, discussion of cultural factors has led to a greater openness to scholarship that seeks answers to the questions of the non-western world. However, in spite of broader contextual discussions in *content*, the *methodology* of higher education remains fixedly subject to the hegemony of predominantly white western male understandings of learning—particularly at the advanced masters and doctoral levels. Even in fields such as missiology the language of cultural sensitivity advocated in theory is denied in practice because of the current restrictive understanding of the nature of scholarly research.

I am a white western male who relates well to the accepted methodology of higher education, and I found my doctoral thesis-writing process relatively straightforward. However, nearly two decades of teaching education in the non-western world has made me increasingly uncomfortable with the status quo. I have become convinced that there is a frightening level of culture and gender imperialism in higher level

theological study—not so much in content as in the narrow understanding of scholarly methodology embedded in the linear-analytic shape of thesis-writing that has become virtually sacrosanct in the academy.

The church has become impoverished by limitations imposed on what is possible in the methodology permitted in advanced theological reflection. But around the globe quality assurance in higher education is increasingly being assessed on the basis of 'fitness for purpose'<sup>2</sup> rather than adherence to a narrow band of instructional input. Therefore, while not rejecting the traditional model, there is great potential for new approaches to prepare quality scholar-teachers—approaches the non-western church is now well-equipped to embrace, if it has the will.

### I Culture, Gender, and Learning

*Culture and learning:* An overwhelming body of research has established what cultural anthropologists have intuited for decades: people from different cultures think in fundamentally different ways. While the differences are not absolute, and there is wide diversity and individual variation, there are strong, statistically significant differences between the ways in which information is processed by people from different cultural backgrounds, and this has a profound impact on the ways in which learning takes place from culture to culture.

Numerous examples could be proffered. One example is found in the work of the team led by Richard Nisbett<sup>3</sup> who studied differences in thinking and learning patterns between East Asians and European Americans studying together at the same American university. Despite comparable instructional input it was found that the western students tended to process information through more analytic approaches, while the Asian students preferred working through holistic reasoning. From this, and other research, Nisbett's team suggested four areas in which westerners and easterners process information differently:

*Attention and control:* Reasoning processes begin with filtering through the surrounding information. Since it is impossible to attend to everything all the time, people are highly selective in the way material is filtered, and these processes seem to be culturally influenced. In general, East Asians tend to focus on the overall field, seeing wholes, and observing co-variations; while westerners tend to focus on specifics, isolating and analysing the elements as the necessary step towards generalisation.<sup>4</sup>

*Relationships vs. rules:* Cultural variations in attending to the environment also lead to differing ways of organizing objects, events, and people. For instance, Chinese students are more likely to group on the basis of some kind of relationship, while European-American students are more likely to group on the basis of a shared category.<sup>5</sup> These different results are consistent with the communal nature of East Asian society as against the analytical-individualistic character of most Western societies.

*Experiential knowledge vs. formal logic:* When engaging in deductive reasoning, East Asian students tend to prefer beginning with experiential knowledge based on intuitive understandings emerging from direct perception,<sup>6</sup> reflecting a general understanding of truth and reality as relational and changeable. In contrast, Western students tend to rely on logic and abstract principles, reflecting a general understanding of truth and reality as consistent.

Comparing the Attention to Context of East Asians and Americans', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 34, No. 9, 2008, 1260-1275; Nisbett et al., 'Culture and Systems of Thought'.

<sup>5</sup> L-J. Ji, 'Culture, Language, and Categorization', unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2001, quoted in Nisbett et al. 2001, 'Culture and Systems of Thought', 300.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. M. V. Alfred, 'Philosophical Foundations of Andragogy and Self-directed Learning: A Critical Analysis from an Africentric Feminist Perspective', in M. Glowacki-Dudka (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 19th annual Midwest Research to Practice Conference in Adult, Continuing, and Community Education* (pp. 21-26), Madison: U. of Wisconsin, 2000, who sees the same pattern in African-American learners.

<sup>1</sup> J. Mbiti, 'Theological Impotence and the Universality of the Church', *Lutheran World*, Vol. 21 No. 3, 1974, 251-260.

<sup>2</sup> *European University Association (EUA) Bologna Handbook*, on-line at <http://www.bologna-handbook.com>, accessed 12 October 2009.

<sup>3</sup> R. E. Nisbett, I. Choi, K. Peng, & A. Norenzayan, 'Culture and Systems of Thought: Holistic versus Analytic Cognition', *Psychological Review*, Vol. 108, No. 2, 2001, 291-310.

<sup>4</sup> A. Boduroglu, P. Shah, & R.E. Nisbett, 'Cultural Differences in Allocation of Attention in Visual Information Processing', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 2009, 349-360; L-J. Ji, K. Peng, & R.E. Nisbett, 'Culture, Control, and Perception of Relationships in the Environment', *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, Vol. 78, No. 5, 2000, 943-955; T. Masuda, R. Gonzalez, L. Kwan, & R.E. Nisbett, 'Culture and Aesthetic Preference:

ent and logical.<sup>7</sup>

*Dialectics vs. the law of non-contradiction:* East Asians and European-Americans have differing levels of commitment to avoid apparent contradiction in deductive reasoning. Peng and Nisbett<sup>8</sup> suggested that these differences emerge from cultural patterns of logic. For example, in western logic rules such as these have played a central role:

- The law of identity:  $A = A$ . A thing is identical to itself.
- The law of non-contradiction:  $A \neq \text{not-}A$ . No statement can be both true and false.
- The law of the excluded middle: Any statement is either true or false.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, Chinese logic is based on Chinese dialecticism which embraces principles such as the following:<sup>10</sup>

- The principle of change: Reality is a process that is not static but rather is dynamic and changeable.<sup>11</sup> A

thing need not be identical to itself at all because of the fluid nature of reality.

- The principle of contradiction: Partly because change is constant, contradiction is constant: old and new, good and bad, exist in the same object or event and indeed depend on one another for their existence.
- The principle of relationship or holism: Because of constant change and contradiction, nothing either in human life or in nature is isolated and independent, but instead everything is related. It follows that attempting to isolate elements of some larger whole can only be misleading.

In summary, Nisbett's team suggested that western students tend toward information-processing that is linear, specific, analytic, theoretical, and individualistic-competitive, while East Asian students prefer to think through patterns that are circular, interconnected, holistic, experiential, and communal.

This is just one example from the enormous body of research into culture and thinking which is unanimous in affirming the wide variety in thinking and learning patterns across cultures. In particular, the growing body of intercultural research suggests that the linear-analytical thinking of Greek philosophy and the Enlightenment which have so shaped western educational systems is globally atypical. While the specifics differ, the general pattern of information processing throughout most of the non-western world tends towards holism and networked think-

ing, rather than the tight specificity so typical in western academia.<sup>12</sup>

*Gender and learning:* The hegemony of narrow linear rationalist structures in higher education is not merely a case of western *cultural* dominance of the academy but also an act of *gender* discrimination—for holistic interconnectivity in thinking patterns is also the norm for women, even white western women.

Recent research has revealed that the typical male brain tends to be highly attuned to specificity in tasks, and prefers to compartmentalise and simplify tasks as much as possible: it is hard-wired for understanding and building systems around specific content.<sup>13</sup> The typical woman's brain tends to be geared to see multiple implications and prefers to see the big picture when completing tasks.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See for example C.W. Bauman & L.J. Skitka, 'Ethnic Group Differences in Lay Philosophies of Behavior in the United States', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2006), 438-445; S. Merriam, R.S. Caffarella, & L.M. Baumgartner, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 238-239; S.H. Schwartz, 'Universals in the Content and Structure of Values: Theoretical Advances and Empirical Tests in 20 Countries', in M. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (pp. 1-65), Orlando, FL: Academic Press, 1992; H.C. Triandis, 'The Self and Social Behavior in Differing Cultural Contexts', *Psychological Review*, Vol. 96 (1989), 506-520.

<sup>13</sup> S. Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference: Men, Women and the Extreme Male Brain* (New York: Basic, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> D. Goleman, *Social Intelligence* (New York: Bantam, 2006), 139; M. Gurian & P. Henley, *Boys and Girls Learn Differently! A Guide for Teachers and Parents* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 41-42.

Women have also greater interconnectivity between the verbal, reasoning, and emotional parts of the brain, and consequently tend to prefer learning in community by talking through the issues and ideas being presented.<sup>15</sup> In contrast, males tend to prefer processing ideas and issues without having to exercise the language parts of their brains; or if they use speech in learning it tends to be through debate and argument over very specific points.

Males like abstract arguments, philosophical problems, and moral debates about abstract principles, and are happy to do big picture theoretical philosophy or theology divorced from day to day life. Women have difficulty understanding the value or meaning of theory without specific, concrete examples, and tend to do best in learning opportunities in which they are involved in hands-on, practical experiences.<sup>16</sup> Stated simply, men tend to prefer to go from theory to practice, women tend to prefer to go from practice to theory.

<sup>15</sup> M.F. Belenky & A.V. Stanton, 'Inequality, Development and Connected Knowing', in J. Mezirow (ed.), *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (pp. 71-102) (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 82; C. Stonehouse, 'Learning from Gender Differences', in K. O. Gangel & J. C. Wilhoit (eds.), *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Adult Education* (pp. 104-120) (Grand Rapids, IL: Baker, 1993), 117.

<sup>16</sup> M. Philbin, E. Meier, S. Huffman, & P. Boverie, 'A Survey of Gender and Learning Styles', *Sex Roles*, Vol. 32, No. 7-8, 1995, 485-494; M.F. Williamson & R.L. Watson, 'Learning Styles Research: Understanding how Teaching Should be Impacted by the Way Learners Learn; Part II: Understanding how Learners Prefer to Receive Information', *Christian Education Journal*, Series 3, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2006), 343-361.

<sup>7</sup> A. Norenzayan, 'Rule-based and Experience-based Thinking: The Cognitive Consequences of Intellectual Traditions', unpublished Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1999, quoted in Nisbett et al., 'Culture and Systems of Thought', 301.

<sup>8</sup> K. Peng & R.E. Nisbett, 'Culture, Dialectics, and Reasoning about Contradiction', *American Psychologist*, Vol. 54, No. 9, 1999, 741-754.

<sup>9</sup> Nisbett et al., 'Culture and Systems of Thought', 301.

<sup>10</sup> J. Spencer-Rodgers, H.C. Boucher, S.C. Mori, L. Wang & K. Peng, 'The Dialectical Self-concept: Contradiction, Change, and Holism in East Asian Cultures', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 35, No. 1, (2009), 29-44.

<sup>11</sup> See also L.-J. Ji, 'The Leopard Cannot Change his Spots, or Can he? Culture and the Development of Lay Theories of Change', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Vol. 34,

No. 5 (2008), 613-622.



## II Culture and Gender Imperialism in Higher Research

The classic approach to higher level research is linear, specific, analytic, hypothesis-driven, and individualistic-competitive: this is seen in the standard shape expected in higher research theses, almost irrespective of the discipline. The approach is deeply rooted in the West's love affair with the scientific method, an approach that brought great gifts to the development of knowledge in the physical sciences. The scientific method in turn emerged out of the Enlightenment's embrace of Greek analytical patterns of reasoning. Because of the great benefit experienced by western society through this form of analytical reasoning, particularly during the Industrial Revolution, the scientific method was subsequently applied to all fields of study as the only source of sure knowledge.<sup>17</sup>

The linear, specific, analytic, hypothesis-driven, and individualistic-competitive approach to research is far more likely to suit the thinking processes of white western males than women in general, or students from collectivist societies.<sup>18</sup> This is not surprising, given that the now internationalised model of advanced masters and doctoral education was developed in the West and in its earliest generations was a virtual 'closed shop' for

male students only. Until today the most admired academic institutions in the world are in the West and are dominated by white male faculty and administration. These institutions have enormous influence on the shape of international accreditation, which in turn dominates globally the curricular decisions of higher education. The approach is rarely questioned. In part this is because most white western males cannot understand how people could learn otherwise: more than once I have been asked by colleagues in the West, 'Doesn't everyone learn this way?'

The need for holistic wisdom amongst Christian thinkers is imperative in the post-modern world. We should not completely reject Greek-based analytic cognitive reasoning, but we need to be aware that it is not the only way to perceive and process information, and that it has inherent limitations. It needs to be enriched by other forms of reasoning in order to be able to assess life situations in alternative and possibly more comprehensive ways.

Sadly, in the process of satisfying the linear-analytical requirements of the academy, many non-western and women scholars become increasingly westernised and male-genderised, and so we lose the great potential gift of alternate thinking patterns they offer—in particular a level of holistic multidisciplinary theological reflection desperately needed by a church whose 'centre of gravity' is moving increasingly east and south.

## III The Hidden Curriculum of Higher Theological Education

Much higher education (including the-

ological education) has lost its focus on genuine learning, and has instead devolved into a means by which a person might join a fraternity (the gender is intentional). Even Protestants, with their supposed passion for 'the priesthood of all believers', have embraced a new high priesthood guild of academics who often view with disdain the simple faith of many in the church.<sup>19</sup> To paraphrase from Cleophus LaRue,<sup>20</sup> 'too many scholars leave our theological schools clutching a degree that says Doctor of Divinity, but people do not come to know God until they have been doctored by Divinity'. One hopes that theological educators would long for more than this—especially when churches are desperately in need of servant leaders!

One of the most stark reminders of the guild nature of higher education is the rigid emphasis on style. As Theodore Ziolkowski commented, '[A]t many institutions, the locally approved manual of style has become so dominant and so tyrannically enforced that the candidate comes away with the notion that style matters more than substance.'<sup>21</sup> This is seen in the almost 'sacred' adherence of most programs of higher education around the world to Kate Turabian's *Manual for*

*Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*,<sup>22</sup> originally published in 1937 at the height of western modernity, and now in its seventh edition.

My wife spent six months writing two complex significant chapters of her doctoral thesis. Following a successful viva, in which she demonstrated clear mastery of the field and scholarly competence, it took her almost another six months to satisfy the trivial style requirements of the administrative staff of the well-known Christian institution. The time and effort involved was largely meaningless, and the contribution to genuine learning was nil. A friend commented, 'I think you have to realise that it's not about learning; it's about paying your dues to the academy.'

The extent to which leaders in evangelical theological education have accepted and promoted the status quo is disturbing, and it reflects a profound ignorance of the negative hidden curriculum embedded within the traditional model of higher theological education.<sup>23</sup> The current practices unwittingly but very powerfully communicate that:

- White western males have the 'best' approach to learning; they have established the system and through their international accreditation patterns they have the power to force the world into their 'better' mould. The rigid linear-analytical and individualistic approach to ad-

17 T. Ziolkowski, 'The Ph.D. Squid', *American Scholar*, Vol. 59, No. 2, 1990, 177-195.

18 S.P. Ango, 'Lessons for Effective Christian Education in Golmo: An African Traditional Approach to Teaching and Learning', *Christian Education Journal*, Series 3, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2007, 17-33.

19 L.W. Caldwell, 'Towards the New Discipline of Ethnohermeneutics: Questioning the Relevancy of Western Hermeneutical Methods in the Asian Context', *Journal of Asian Mission*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1999, 21-43; P.W.H. Shaw, 'The Hidden Curriculum of Seminary Education', *Journal of Asian Mission*, Vol. 8, No. 1-2, 2006, 23-51.

20 C.J. LaRue, 'God's Foolishness', *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, New Series Vol. XXI, No. 3, 2000, 283-286.

21 Ziolkowski, 'The Ph.D. Squid', 193.

22 K.L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (Seventh Edition: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers) (Chicago, IL: U. of Chicago, 2007).

23 Shaw, 'The Hidden Curriculum of Seminary Education'.

vanced research communicates a hierarchical imperialistic—even racist—understanding of education.

- A 'real' scholar thinks as a white western male. Obtaining a doctoral degree is the reward for becoming like a white, western, male. In the process of higher education non-western emerging leaders are trained to answer questions that nobody in their context is asking, or to answer questions using thought processes which people in their context find unconvincing. Non-westerners and women are trained to learn and then teach in patterns which are inappropriate to their culturally or gender-preferred learning style. Is part of the reason for the well-known 'brain drain' by non-westerners from the non-western world that they are not just 'wiser and more intelligent' after their studies, but are now cultural misfits in their homeland?
- Christian leaders should engage in mindless submission to authority in order to be accepted into positions of power and respect. Our bondage to a pre-determined shape of higher level study rewards those with a predisposition to conform and penalises genuine creativity,<sup>24</sup> when one of the greatest needs the church faces today is the development and nurture of creative and visionary

leadership.<sup>25</sup>

- The final measure of accomplishment is not the quality of the content but the shape of the minutiae. This is reflected in the petty perfectionism which requires so much time to be wasted on focusing on the trivialities of thesis format.
- In Christian higher education it is more essential that we imitate and satisfy the secular world than it is to provide a witness to the world by showing a better way of practising fundamental Christian values of stewardship of time and money.

'The medium is the message.'

The most powerful formative lessons learned in any institution are those communicated not through the direct instruction given but through the shape of the leadership and structures nurtured by the institution. And much of what takes place through the current medium of higher theological education is counterproductive for meeting the needs of the church in the non-western world.

#### IV What is Higher Theological Education Trying to Accomplish?

Increasingly, higher education accrediting bodies are seeking quality assurance based on 'fitness for purpose'<sup>26</sup> rather than strict adherence to a standardised pattern. A consequence of this is that the issue for doctoral competence should not be whether candidates can complete a set of standard-

ised tasks, but whether the purpose of doctoral study has been achieved.

Essentially there are two goals for higher education: First, expanding the horizons of scholarship; and then, ensuring a well-educated cadre of informed teachers for emerging generations of students.

##### 1. Scholarship

No one questions the call for quality Christian scholarship. Continuing new contributions to knowledge and understanding are desperately needed, and theological reflection should be at the forefront of how contemporary world issues are addressed. There is also no question that the classic approach to higher level research makes a significant contribution, especially within narrow bands of research.

However, what needs to be appreciated is that the linear, specific, analytic, and hypothesis-driven form of research rarely sees either the big picture that comes from more holistic and multidisciplinary studies, or that the individualistic and competitive approach to study creates graduates who experience difficulty seeing beyond their own career agendas to the broader needs of the kingdom of God. If the church is serious about developing leaders characterised by genuine reflective wisdom and kingdom-mindedness there needs to be far greater diversity in the options available for higher study—both in terms of content and methodology.

##### 2. Teachers

Higher degrees are a form of certification for teaching: accrediting agencies expect faculty to have significantly higher qualifications than the students

they are teaching. 'You can't give what you haven't got' (a well-known Arabic saying) is the basis for this expectation. While this statement is generally true, the converse is certainly not necessarily so. Simply knowing material does not necessarily mean that a person can teach.

Most of us have experienced instructors at tertiary level who are a boring tribulation to their students, showing little or no teaching competence. Often the real interest of faculty is their own research and they teach under duress rather than from pleasure and commitment. Faculty contracts often reinforce this pattern: they state expectations for faculty to write and publish extensively—and as the basis for promotion—but rarely mention the need for faculty to seek excellence in instructional methodology.

Far too many faculty have never either attended a seminar on educational theory and practice or taken time to understand how best to nurture and enhance adult learning. The end result is instructors who teach as they have learned, with a strong predilection for a combination of lecture input and papers as student output that is linear, specific, analytic, abstract, and often with little relevance to the lives of the students.

If the church is serious about giving meaning to higher level theological education as a basis for developing cadres of quality teachers, then there needs to be a greater emphasis on excellence in instructional skill to match the expectation of reflective excellence.

<sup>24</sup> F. Cano-Garcia & E.H. Hughes, 'Learning and Thinking Styles: An Analysis of their Interrelationship and Influence on Academic Achievement', *Educational Psychology*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (2000), 413-427; R.J. Wlodkowski & M.B. Ginsberg, *Diversity and Motivation: Culturally Responsive Teaching* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1995), 277.

<sup>25</sup> Shaw, 'The Hidden Curriculum of Seminary Education', 37.

<sup>26</sup> EUA Bologna Handbook.

## V 'New Treasures with the Old': Suggestions for Ways Ahead

I do not want the academy to reject outright the traditional linear, specific, analytic, hypothesis-driven, and individualistic-competitive approach to theological reflection. The theological world has benefited enormously from the model and can continue to do so. However, if the church is to move beyond mere rhetoric about globalising theological education serious attention needs to be paid to the current hegemony of white western male patterns of research. A far broader range of options needs to be made available in terms of both content and methodology.

Quality graduates at senior masters and doctoral level should be able to demonstrate both a high level of mastery of the field *and* teaching competence. However, it may be that alternative approaches will prove equal to, or even better than, thesis-writing for demonstrating competency in these two areas. I will suggest six possible alternatives. While many schools are already incorporating elements of some of these suggestions into their programs, I encourage these *in and of themselves* to be acceptable in lieu of the thesis.

### 1. Multidisciplinary research built on mind-mapping

Rather than requiring a student to focus in depth on a narrow field, opportunity and encouragement should be given to develop broad-stroke multidisciplinary study based on the complex intertwining that emerges from mind-

maps. This arises from the concern expressed by Mark Taylor:<sup>27</sup>

[The current] university model has led to separation where there ought to be collaboration and to ever-increasing specialization.... [As] departments fragment, research and publication become more and more about less and less. Each academic becomes the trustee not of a branch of the sciences, but of limited knowledge that all too often is irrelevant for genuinely important problems.

Contemporary technology has made extensive cross-referencing for meaning-making a far easier process than in the past, as it guides the reader through the complex intertwining of thought involved in broad interdisciplinary research. The result may provide little solution and clear result, and so may not satisfy many who have studied in classic Aristotelian categories. However, my experience of reading non-linear work written by non-western students is that, while it may take more patience to understand the analogical patterns of thinking, a new level of dynamic insight may result. This is particularly so in the field of theology, in which pointing out mystery and complexity without demanding immediate resolution may be just as important as explaining and predicting.<sup>28</sup>

27 M.C. Taylor, 'End the University as we Know it', *New York Times*, April 27 (2009), A23.

28 M. Enns, "Now I Know in Part": Holistic and Analytic Reasoning and their Contribution to Fuller Knowing in Theological Education', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, Vol. 29, No. 3, (2005), 251-269.

### 2. Action research

While the sterile objectivity and theoretical speculation praised by rationalist philosophy has lost some of its credibility in the post-modern world, it still tends to dominate the *shape* of thesis-writing, even among those who pay lip-service to the demise of modernism. But there may be greater significance for the church if the emphasis on 'reflective practice' is more on the practice than on the reflection, and the basis of assessment is the student's ability to lead a church reflectively in evangelism, the pursuit of justice, discipleship and spiritual growth, rather than the product of solitary library research.<sup>29</sup> Andrew Kirk has reinforced the potential of this:

It is now a commonplace of much theological endeavour in the church of the global South that the verification of genuine theology is determined not so much by criteria formulated within the parameters of the academic community, as by its ability to liberate people for effective involvement in society. If it does not have this effect, it is considered an alienated and alienating force.<sup>30</sup>

Over the past 30 years the challenges embedded in the work of Paulo Freire<sup>31</sup> have gained ground in secular

higher education, and 'action research' has become an increasingly credible alternative to the traditional 'scientific' model. The foundation of action research is the conviction that significant social knowledge seeks not merely to reflect on an action from afar but seeks to both transform and be transformed by well-informed action in practice. The process involves simultaneous

[A]ction and inquiry [in] a disciplined leadership practice that increases the wider effectiveness of our actions. Such action helps individuals, teams, organizations become more capable of self-transformation and thus more creative, more aware, more just and more sustainable.<sup>32</sup>

In light of the pressing need for the church to move from orthodoxy to orthopraxis, comparable opportunities for reflection in action should be affirmed and encouraged in higher theological education.

To take this one stage further, it may be possible for a person to be granted an advanced masters or even a doctoral degree by publishing one or more reflective articles that both document action and challenge the church—perhaps accompanied by evidence of a major contribution to the life of the church and extensive oral examination. The end result may benefit the reflective life of the church much more than many successful senior academic theses.

29 R.J. Priest, 'Christian Theology, Sin, and Anthropology', in W. Adams & F. Salomone (Eds.), *Anthropology and Theology: God, Icons, and God-talk* (pp. 59-75) (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000).

30 J.A. Kirk, 'Re-envisioning the Theological Curriculum as if the *Missio Dei* Mattered', *Common Ground Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 23-40.

31 P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, translated by M.B. Ramos (London: Penguin, 1970).

32 W. Torbert & Associates, *Action Inquiry: The Secret of Timely and Transforming Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2004). Cf. the emancipatory learning model of M. Hammond & R. Collins, *Self-directed Learning: Critical Practice* (London: Nichols, 1991).



### 3. Writing for the church

Even in programs of study that purport to be ministry-oriented, few theses or dissertations are seen by the church or considered meaningful to the church. Frankly, they are boring and nobody *wants* to read them! Too often the seminary seems to exist for itself or (worse) to impress the broader secular academy. If the seminary genuinely exists for the church in its missional calling to the world, there needs to be a greater emphasis on projects that are meaningful for the church!

Think of John Stott, Ajith Fernando, Ravi Zacharias, Colin Chapman, and Eugene Peterson: these are some of the world's most influential evangelical thinkers, but they (among others) have never completed a formal doctoral degree. How much more valuable is the written work of these scholars to the reflective practice of the church than the vast majority of dissertations that have been written! May it be possible for the doctoral project of an evangelical leader to be writing and publishing a book that is theologically significant and connected to the life of the church? This would benefit the church in the non-western world much more than theses that are read by so few.

An allied contemporary approach is advocated by Taylor.<sup>33</sup> Observing the dramatic decline in the number of dissertations converted into books and the dismal sales of those that are printed, Taylor asserts that the traditional dissertation is obsolete. Instead, higher education should embrace contemporary technology and encourage students to develop analytic treat-

ments in modern technological formats (hypertext and web sites, films and videos) that are more likely to carry meaning among emerging generations of thinkers.

### 4. Passionate writing

A holistic understanding of human personality is essential to biblical anthropology. Effective learning also requires interconnection between the cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions.<sup>34</sup> Such interconnection is an essential element in the thinking and learning patterns of women in general and of scholars from most non-western contexts. Males tend to have difficulty articulating their emotions<sup>35</sup> and it is natural for them to seek the safety of rationalistic approaches to learning. However, to force the same approaches on women and non-westerners is an act of gender discrimination and cultural imperialism.

Affirming the affective dimension in reflection and writing must inevitably bring positive results. A person's intelligence quotient (IQ) contributes at best about 20% to life success: Of far greater significance is one's emotional intelligence (EQ), measuring factors like emotional stability, social skills, positive attitudes, and self-motivation.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, if material is worth

34 P. W. H. Shaw, 'Multi-dimensional Learning in Ministerial Training,' *International Congregational Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2006, 53-63.

35 D. Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam, 1995), 54; M. Gurian & P. Henley, *Boys and Girls Learn Differently! A Guide for Teachers and Parents* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 29-32.

36 Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*; P. Salovey & J.D. Mayer, 'Emotional intelligence', *Imagination, Cognition, and Personality*, Vol. 9

studying to the level of depth demanded in doctoral study, it is worth getting passionate about. Is a lack of emotion a sign of academic superiority, or a sign of imbalance in the human personality?

If we are serious about building a cadre of competent scholar-teachers then we must take seriously the need to move beyond the current commitment to sterile rationalism and see as imperative the embrace and nurture of the affective dimension of learning.

### 5. Relational learning

The solitary and isolated study needed to complete the doctoral dissertation reflects the individualistic character of western society, but is uncomfortable and inappropriate in more collectivist cultures.<sup>37</sup> Foundational to good teaching is the quality of relationship between teacher and student. People with high emotional intelligence (who make good teachers) tend to prefer relational learning methods that are frequently underemphasised or ignored in the research/dissertation approach of higher-level studies. So does the current approach applaud people who are prone to be bad teachers or social misfits?

At the very least, in advanced studies, a far greater emphasis needs to be

placed on the learning community. Ziolkowski observed that

all the studies have shown that few factors affect rapid completion of the Ph.D. as powerfully as a close and encouraging relationship between student and adviser—a relationship that thrives much less easily in the lonely 'library disciplines' than in the more convivial laboratory sciences.<sup>38</sup>

If this is true in western, male contexts, how much more significant is the need for supervisor and peer support and encouragement with women and non-westerners.

The current emphasis in higher theological education on objective, individualistic learning is rooted in a theologically faulty epistemology. When the Bible speaks of 'knowing' it is not speaking of some sort of objective knowledge, but of a relationship.<sup>39</sup> 'To know' in the Scriptures is to have relationship—a relationship between God and a person, between God and the community, between person and person.<sup>40</sup> This is a knowing relationship that finds its source in God's self-revelation to humanity.<sup>41</sup> It is not a

38 Ziolkowski, 'The Ph.D. Squid', 192.

39 Shaw, 'Multi-dimensional Learning'; N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 239.

40 D.E. Miller, *Story and Context: An Introduction to Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1987), 271.

41 T. Gillespie, 'What is "Theological" about Theological Education?' *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (1993), 55-63; R. Banks, *Re-envisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids, IL: Eerdmans, 1999), 63.

33 Taylor, 'End the University as we Know it.'



matter of *us* discovering truth, but of *us* coming to know *only as we are already known*.<sup>42</sup> Theology is relational, not just cognitive.<sup>43</sup>

In light of the fundamentally relational character of theological knowledge, it may be possible to embrace a more radical but culturally-sensitive approach to advanced level theological education by enabling two or more scholars to collaborate on a major project. Certainly, the hidden curriculum of affirming synergetic learning holds great potential, developing leaders who have experienced and modelled team work through learning together. Monitoring such joint projects can be notoriously difficult, but surely a fair assessment of the competence of each team member is possible through the careful documentation of the contributions of team members and extensive oral examination.

Another approach that affirms relational learning would be to remove the thesis requirement completely, and instead require candidates to lead a series of substantial seminars, each seminar accompanied by a detailed seminar paper. This approach would affirm the relational predilection of many women and non-westerners, while ensuring competence in both scholarship and instructional skill.<sup>44</sup> Some institutions have embraced this approach at the MA level, but it could be extended to the granting of advanced masters'

and doctoral degrees for innovative and original instructors.

## 6. Contextualised methodology

Much is written and discussed in the name of 'contextualised theology', and the insights gained are invaluable, but the reality is that the *methodology and shape* used in most 'contextualised theology' continues to be thoroughly western. Genuine contextualised theology will not simply discuss contextual issues, but will use contextual methods of argument. Aristotelian logic has become the predominant shape of white western argument, and it is consequently quite reasonable for western scholars to engage in theological reflection through this shape.

However, this is only one form of reflection and argument. In many other societies the dominant shape of persuasive discourse is through narrative, poetry, epic, and proverb (all of these find strong precedent in the Scriptures). The theological world could benefit as it affirms other methods of discourse alongside westernised forms of communication in theological reflection.

African scholars like John Mbiti and Kwame Bediako are remarkable in the powerful way in which they communicate profound theological ideas through narrative. I have on occasion challenged Middle Eastern scholars to consider the primary approaches to meaningful communication in their own local context, and to communicate 'contextualised ideas' in 'contextualised forms' such as poetry, proverb, and epic. Generally the response has been, '... but this would never be accepted or read beyond our own community!'

Could scholars be acknowledged as scholars for doing contextualised theology in both content and form? What would be the response of the academy to a Persian who offers an epic theological poem for his ThD, or a Nigerian who discusses profound theological thought through an extended tribal narrative, or an Arab who communicates through an extended text that intertwines ideas with proverbs and passionate rhetoric? Certainly the worldwide community of faith would be enriched by such.

## VI The Courage to Challenge

Almost twenty years ago Paul Stevens lamented that, despite the rhetoric, in reality

[T]he current practice of globalization tends to work against contextualization. Instead of mutual sharing and mutual learning there is usually wholesale, uncritical importing and exporting of the Western model. In other words, globalization has become the universalization of the

Western model with a minimum of contextualization.<sup>45</sup>

Evidence points to the future centre of God's work worldwide lying not in the West but in the rapidly-growing Church of the South and the East. The time has come for the global non-western church to recognise the strength of its holistic and relational educational traditions for the development of quality theological leaders.

The main thing preventing significant creative change is the courage to challenge the white western male hegemony of the academy and to affirm the possibility of alternative methods in higher theological education. Given the growing strength of the church in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the issue is no longer whether methodological change will take place, but who will step out and do it.

<sup>42</sup> 1 Cor 13:12. Cf. P.J. Palmer, *To Know as we are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1983).

<sup>43</sup> A. McGrath, *The Future of Christianity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 139.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. R.S. Barth, *Learning by Heart* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 130-134.

<sup>45</sup> R. P. Stevens, 'Marketing the Faith: A Reflection on the Importing and Exporting of Western Theological Education', *Crux*, Vol. XXVIII, (2 June 1992), 6-18.