

DIDACHE: FAITHFUL TEACHING 17: 1 INTRODUCTION

Dean G. Blevins, Sr. Editor

Welcome to *Didache: Faithful Teaching*, Volume 17:1, this volume marks the beginning of our 17th year of exploring the intersections of theology, culture and education within the Wesleyan Tradition. This current edition reflects a range of writing, new and old, that encompasses those areas of engagement for the sake of higher education. The edition begins with explorations into one of the primary theological challenges in our global society, prosperity theology; a challenge often overlooked by our tradition. However, the journal also celebrates theological responses by students based on social justice and missional engagement. The edition then addresses the role of theological education, primarily through seasoned educators and theologians. Finally, the journal concludes with two essays that embody the overall flow of this volume, offering new and mature visions of theological education that may well embody the promise and wisdom of our collective future.

As noted, the first two offerings of this edition come from global settings dealing with variations of prosperity theology, also known as the health and wealth gospel.¹ Dorothy Bullón opens the edition with an English and Spanish language reflection on health, prosperity and victory in a Latin American context. A respected educator and minister within the Mesoamerican region, Bullón raises several key questions about the theological underpinnings of prosperity theology, commensurate with other studies, before offering a constructive response within a Wesleyan vision. Kirsten Jeffery explores similar themes from an African context before turning to the writings of the apostle Paul in Romans. Ms. Jeffery, a recent graduate of NTC Manchester, offers her student submission with a recommendation from Dr. Svetlana Khobnya, Ph.D. Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Languages, Nazarene Theological College. Our thanks to Dr. Khobnya in recommending Ms. Jeffery's well written adaptation of her thesis.

Readers should acknowledge that prosperity theology remains a peculiarly USA export, one that now plagues all global regions.² Anchored not only in Pentecostalism, but also the New Thought movement of the 19th century, this aberrant theological vision persists in the USA.³ Church practitioners may note both blatant examples, like televangelists, and more nuanced expressions through congregational movements like the Prayer of Jabez, or practices like money-back

¹ Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

² Judith L. Hill, "Theology of Prosperity: a New Testament Perspective." *Africa Journal Of Evangelical Theology* 28, no. 1 (2009): 43-55; Christopher J H Wright, and Evangelization Lausanne Committee for World, "Lausanne Theology Working Group Statement on the Prosperity Gospel" *Evangelical Review Of Theology* 34, no. 2 (2010): 99-102.

³ Dennis P. Hollinger, "Enjoying God Forever: an Historical/Sociological Profile of the Health and Wealth Gospel." *Trinity Journal* 9, no. 2 (1988): 131-149; Dawn L. Hutchinson, "New Thought's Prosperity Theology and its Influence on American Ideas of Success." *Nova Religio* 18, no. 2 (2014): 28-44; Douglas J. Moo, "Divine Healing in the Health and Wealth Gospel." *Trinity Journal* 9, no. 2 (1988): 191-209.

guarantees on tithing offerings.⁴ With recent changes in the US political landscape, prosperity theology may well represent an entrenched populist view of Christianity reflective of other world regions.⁵ Bullón and Jeffery invite Wesleyans into a needed conversation around this controversial movement.

The journal then offers two additional, yet indirect, responses to prosperity theology through the writing of Nazarene Theological Seminary graduates Jason Phelps and Tami Lundgren. Jason Phelps's reflective engagement of Jubilee-Sabbath, in the face of the rapidly expanding gap between wealth and poverty, serves as this year's Tom Nees Social Justice Award. Tami Lundgren explores how missional theology's engagement within several cultural paradigms requires a multidisciplinary approach. Ms. Lundgren's paper received the Dean's Award in academic writing at NTS. We are thankful to Dr. Roger Hahn, Dean of the Faculty, for supporting both student submissions.

The next set of writings reflect a different perspective, engaging theological education both as a global endeavor and a disciplinary challenge. Missionary and educator Daryll Gordon Stanton opens this section with a vision for theological education in Africa anchored in Christology. Stanton's view includes not only an organizing scheme for theological education but also strategies for teaching and leading amid a myriad of economic and justice issues reflective of the African context. Stanton serves as a bridge between many of the concerns of the first half of this edition and moving forward as educators for the sake of the globe.

Three rather unique articles follow Stanton's academic reflections. Dean G. Blevins, David Wesley, and Henry W. Spaulding II originally wrote their essays as inaugural addresses at Nazarene Theological Seminary from within their respective disciplines of Christian discipleship, intercultural mission, and philosophical theology. Historically, NTS published these addresses through its private newsletter/journal, *The Tower*. However, the seminary discontinued that publication during the intervening years. At the same time NTS supported the ongoing publication of this journal, so it seems appropriate to publish these academic writings, even if portions of the essays no longer fully reflect the authors' thought. Readers may find within these

⁴ Laurie Goodstein, "A Book Spreads the Word: Prayer for Prosperity Works," *The NY Times* (May 08, 2001), accessed online (5/14/2017) <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/05/08/us/a-book-spreads-the-word-prayer-for-prosperity-works.html>; Kate Schellnutt, "When Tithing Comes With a Money-Back Guarantee," Web Only version (June 28, 2016) accessed online (5/14/2017) <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/june-web-only/faithful-tithing-now-comes-with-money-back-guarantee.html>.

⁵ Vann R. Newkirk II, "The American Health Care Act's Prosperity Gospel," *The Atlantic* (May 05, 2017) accessed online (5/14/2017) <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/05/the-prosperity-gospel-of-american-health-care/525264/>; Kate Schellnutt, "The Story Behind Trump's Controversial Prayer Partner: What Paula White's Washington Moment Implies for the Prosperity Gospel's Future," *Christianity Today* Web Only version (January 19, 2017) accessed online (5/14/2017) <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/january-web-only/paula-white-donald-trump-prayer-partner-inauguration.html>.

reflections seeds for ongoing study, whether anchored in acknowledging the awkward transition from the baby boomer generation to millennials (Blevins), a struggle with managerial missions (Wesley), or countering the prevailing human subjectivity, and limited role of the Holy Spirit, in theology (Spaulding). Each address may stand the test of the last decade, and offer opportunities to envision the future in a new light.

Envisioning the future for theological education and ministry summarizes the final two offerings for scholars whether beginning their journey, or culminating years of leadership, in theological education. Ryan Giffin, a PhD candidate in Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, offers an essay of his own journey of self-exploration in theological education. Ryan's naming and pursuit of teaching as "midwifery" represents an emerging vision.⁶ While other theorists embrace the concept of teaching as a form of midwifery, Giffin's grounded essay displays the inner awareness of a theological vision for education coming to life (metaphorically "being born") during the writing. While Reverend Giffin's essay reflects new thought, Dr. Roger L. Hahn's commencement address represents the accumulated wisdom of an educator who has taught and lead in theological education more than thirty years. Dr. Hahn retires as Dean of the Faculty at Nazarene Theological Seminary this July 1, 2017 after fifteen years of service. Hahn will continue to teach, yet his commencement address represents a seasoned vision concerning the challenges to ministry (particularly in the United States) and the resources for response. Hahn's address not only serves as a fitting close to the section on theological education, but also to the journal edition. Regardless of the challenges the church faces, faithful teachers can find resources from within our understanding of scripture and the Wesleyan tradition to guide future students and communities of faith.

Just a note on the next edition. Spring 2018, The Church of the Nazarene will host the next Global Theology Conference, currently planned in the USA. The Conference theme and sections will follow a given format with written presentations and responses available through the journal.

GTC2018 Theme: Christology - "To Know Christ" (Phil 3:10)

Session 1: "Who do You Say I Am?" - Knowing & Becoming More Like Jesus Christ

Session 2: "Take Up Your Cross and Follow Me" - Becoming More Faithful To Jesus Christ

Session 3: "As the Father Sent Me So I Send You" - Joining the Mission of Jesus Christ

As always, please note the journal publishes articles along the themes of theology, culture, and education within a Wesleyan heritage. Guidelines for submissions are available at the website. Professors may also submit outstanding student papers (with student permission) as long as they will agree to serve as the reviewer. This edition provides an excellent example of this approach.

I again thank Ernalyng Longcop Fausto, with the staff of the Asia Pacific Region, who works diligently in the formatting and maintenance of our website, and Dr. Tammy Condon who works tirelessly promoting *Didache: Faithful Teaching*, as she does in the development of the Wesleyan Holiness Digital Library (WHDL) <https://www.whdl.org/>.

⁶ Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991; Valley Forge: Trinity Press, 1998).

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