

FORMATION FOR MINISTRY IN A SECULAR AGE: EQUIPPING CLERGY AND LAITY FOR THE CHURCH IN EXILE.

Gordon T. Smith

The Situation in Which We Find Ourselves.

The social and cultural context of the church in North America is aptly described as post Christian, or post-Christendom. It is rightly observed that the church, which a generation ago had a voice, some authority, even perhaps a privileged voice in society, is now a church at the margins – the church, as some have put it, in exile. In some ways this may appear to be a relatively new development. But, in actual fact a the major cultural shift began in the 19th century. Increasingly over the past century and a half, atheism has become the default ideology of the societies of which we are a part. Even if the intellectuals of the West acknowledge a historic and cultural debt to Christianity, the sensibility of our age is no longer merely dismissive of Christianity but as often as not rather ignorant of it. We live in a culture in which at we see traces of the influence of the Christian faith, but where it is no longer the case that we can presume that the Christian voice is even at the table.

The church in North America may be surprised at such a statement. Many assume that if we are in a “secular age” to use the language of Charles Taylor, that this is a relatively recent development. They assume that just a generation ago, Christian sensibilities still had an authoritative influence in the public square. But I wonder if it is actually more accurate to say that at most it *seemed* as such. It may have taken a while but the secularizing seeds planted in the 19th century have grown and matured and now we live now in a world where we face the hegemony of secularism. But my main point is that this has been a long time coming; it is not a recent development.

But, new or old, it is our context. The Christian faith and community is now a distinct minority. The Christian voice is very definitely not the privileged voice.

We tend to bemoan this development and wring our hands and wonder what went wrong. But I wonder if we might instead view this as an opportunity, perhaps even providentially offered to the church. Rather than viewing this as a “tragedy” perhaps we should rather invest our emotional and intellectual energies in the work of asking what it means to be called to be the church in this context. Rather than fighting the loss of “voice” or authority in the culture, might we not ask what it might mean to have a different kind of influence within the societies of which we are a part?

Let’s name this reality and then ask what it means to prepare leadership for such a time as this – thinking especially of the work of theological education for the church in a secular age. Rather than bemoan this development, let’s invest our intellectual and emotional energy in intentionally forming women and men for ministry in this social, cultural and political context.

When we ask this question – what does theological education look like for such a time as this? – we have to first ask what it is we hope to be and do, and how Christian witness and the mission

of the church will find expression in this context. How will it be live out? What does Christian witness look like in this time and in this age?

Typically, there have been three responses to this question; and, of late, a fourth response has been proposed.

- (1) Some, of course, choose to go along to get along. Many suggest – if not explicitly, then in their behaviour – that we should not poke the bear, but actually live out our lives quietly and that we are better off not making a big deal of secular values. The problem with this approach is that suburban Christian lives look remarkably similar to those of their non-Christian neighbours. And the values proclaimed by larger suburban churches are in many respects the values of the age. The church is little more than a false comfort; and women and men are not equipped to actually challenge the culture around them or be a source of prophetic and thus Christian witness. They have, in effect, become secularized. Their religious sensibilities are merely surface sentiments.
- (2) A second option is that of the ghetto – not a new phenomena, but one that the church has turned to in almost every generation has often resorted to: to flee the society and build a protective wall – either literally, or at least sociologically. Whether it be the desert fathers or the Benedictine monastic movement up until the more contemporary Amish communities or even the Bible school movement that still has institutions that very intentionally choose to be “apart” – literally away from the city, intentionally spaces or venues that protect young people by shielding them from the city – this is still an option that some choose.
- (3) Third, there is what has aptly been called the “culture wars” approach to engaging our society. The argument goes like this: we were a Christian country and this reflected the purposes of God in the formation of these western nations. The church and the Christian faith should rightly be a privileged voice and we need to defend this right in the public square, in the legislative bodies and in the courts.
- (4) And then there is a fourth alternative, that perhaps best described by James Davidson Hunter (and others) as “faithful presence” – in, but not of the world, one might say (echoing the language of John 17) (see Davidson Hunter’s *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*): full members of the society of which we are a part, but rather than at war with secularism instead accepting this new dynamic and fashioning a way of being present that reflects deep Christian conviction – faithful to the Gospel, but also present to the society in a way that is not adversarial but actually peaceful – captured, in a sense, by the language of Jeremiah 29 that we are to seek the peace of the city.

Which is it to be? What is the right approach? While without doubt I am inclined to think that the fourth – faithful presence – is what should inform our thinking and practice, there may actually be some truth, some value, in all four approaches, that:

- we need to discern where God is merely calling us to be, to not be at war, but to learn how to get along in a pluralist society, a society with which we are not always and constantly at war, and thus where we simply sometimes acknowledge where “that battle is lost” and we let the issue be;
- we are indeed called, at times, to retreat and withdraw – whether it be literally to the dessert or to safe places of renewal;
- we are called to confront our social context and political systems, though here I would stress that we need to get better at choosing our battles; and,
- we are called to be a faithful presence, but knowing that this will have a cost – a price – a cross that we will have to bear.

Sources of Wisdom.

If this is the challenge for the church in North America, we need to consider the implications for ministerial formation. To navigate this world means that we are going to have to learn what it means to be the church and what it means to do ministry in *this* context – the way it is rather than the way that we wish it to be. And where do we find wisdom or guidance for this challenge and opportunity?

There are at least four potential sources of wisdom or guidance for the church of our generation – voices and perspectives that could provide significant guidance for us. And it would then follow that in preparation for ministry for such a time, that these would be significant resources in ministerial formation.

Prophetic Witness

First, this social and cultural location for the church finds itself in which the church is appropriately compared to that of the experience of the people of Judah when they were in exile. And thus it would follow that surely we should be reading the prophets who spoke and wrote during the period of the exile – the Babylonian captivity. Ezekiel and Daniel were actually part of the exile, but I am thinking here as well of others, including Jeremiah and Isaiah whose writings took account of the exile. Yes, of course, seminary students need to be immersed in the whole of the Scriptures and know how to read the Scriptures from Genesis to the Revelation. But I am wondering if in our time, particular attention should be given to the prophets – always relevant, but particularly relevant to our times.

This reading would give ministerial students at least three perspectives. First, the vision for the city captured by the words of Jeremiah 29 to which I have already alluded: that our engagement with the city is that of those who seek the flourishing of the societies of which we are a part.

Second, an appreciation of the vital place of economic justice in the witness of the church. Worship and witness have no credibility without a commitment to economic justice [see Isaiah 58]. Thus the great observation of Nicholas Wolterstorff that for the OT prophets, there is no

holiness without justice and no justice without economic justice.¹ So frequently, our notions of holiness become little more than morality; while moral depth and integrity is essential, the prophets remind us that it is not a true morality if it is not reflected in a commitment to economic justice.

I am struck by this in my own context: the religious tradition of which I am a part tends to feel the greatest threat from our secular society to be the way in which society challenges our biblical and traditional understandings of human sexuality, gender and marriage. And yet, for the Old Testament prophets, while not an incidental topic or theme, of course, this is not the defining question when it comes to what it means to people the people of God in exile. And it leads me to wonder: should questions of human sexuality be the boundary marker, the critical and defining boundary between the faith of the Christian church and the society at large?

Or, would the witness of the prophets suggest that what defines the church in such a time as this, is a deep commitment to social justice, works of mercy and advocacy for those at the margins of our society? If so, it would radically change the way that we might be perceived in the society at large. So much contemporary Evangelical worship seems actually escapist rather than instead empowering God's people to attend to the social and economic structures in which they live in work. Isaiah 58 suggests that this is deeply incongruous.

And then, third – still with the prophets – how can we not be moved by the remarkable words of Isaiah 43:2 that remind those going into exile that they go they go through the waters, they will not be overcome and when they go through the fire they will not be burned, for the very simple reason that the Lord will be with them and will go through the exile with them? These words suggest that we need to need to learn what it means to know and live with a consciousness of God's presence in a very different social and cultural context; for the people of Judah, the presence of God would look and feel very different during their time in Babylon. But, God would be there. In like manner, the Spirit of God is no less present in our society; it is merely that we need to develop the eyes to see and discern his presence.

The pre-Christendom Church

Second, if we are going to be an effective witness in a post-Christendom world, then it would follow that we would give particular attention to the wisdom we might gain from learning from the *pre-Christendom* church.

Yes, of course we are students of the entire history of the church and our theological vision and perspective should be informed by an immersion in the history – the story – of the church from the first to the 20th century. An MDiv without a strong component of church history is devoid of a crucial building block in ministerial formation. And yet, what I am suggesting is that for our generation, rather than privileging the 16th Century and the 18th Century, as was the case with my own MDiv, the Protestant Reformation and the Great Awakenings, perhaps now Patristics – the

¹ See for example, Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Right and Wrongs* (Princeton University Press, 2010).

study of the church fathers and the Early Church, is more crucial than ever. Perhaps for students who are going to serve the church in a post-Christendom age, we need to learn what it means to draw on the wisdom of the early church prior to the conversion of Constantine. Such a reading and immersion would give contemporary ministry students at least three things.

First, it would help them transcend some of the divisions and polarizations – and debates – that while pertinent perhaps in the 16th and the 18th centuries are quite simply not relevant now. They are, at most, of incidental interest and might help explain our situation but they do not justify it. Our age needs consider what it means that the early church was more fully sacramental while also affirming a deep interiority. I have suggested in other contexts that we need to be Evangelical, Sacramental and Pentecostal, and this insistence that it is not one but all three to which we are called is in part informed by what seems to emerge from the witness of the early church. I should just note in passing that I am amazed of those Christian communities that still insist that 16th century polarities in the church and, to some degree 18th century divisions, should still define Christian division in our day.

Second, it will mean that we have a renewed appreciation of the Creedal character of our faith and witness, including our reading of the Scriptures. We will avoid the Biblicism that has become somewhat rampant in recent Evangelical circles.

Then also, a third learning from the early church is that I am struck by the example of the early church when it comes to the initiation into the Christian faith. Here I would speak to the remarkable work that the Roman Catholic church has done on rites of initiation, evident in the RCIA [Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults], a simply brilliant document and practice – a process – for initiation into Christian faith that is a conscious attempt to take ancient pre-Christendom wisdom and bring it to bear in the life and practice of the contemporary church. I would also add that it means a full restoration of the catechumenate – that the catechesis of our children would be viewed as an essential way by which we live out the life of the church.

Churches that have been Historically in the Minority

Third, while this situation may be unique to us – to be the church in a post-Christendom age – the church has always, somewhere at least, lived with the challenge or reality of being a minority presence. There have always been segments of the church that have been “in the minority” and have learned how to thrive and how to be an effective witness while being in the minority. This may be a relatively new development for the church in Western Europe and North America. But, not so for many global Christian communities

I think for example of the historic Christian churches in the Middle East – Lebanon, Iraq, Pakistan and Turkey and India – particularly those in nations or regions of the world where Islam or Hinduism or Buddhism is the dominant religious presence, but where there has always been a church that not merely survived but actually thrived as a minority presence. As often as not, this meant persecution; not always, but often.

Surely as the church in the west moves into this kind of situation – a minority position – then we should humbly recognize that we have something to learn from those for whom this is nothing new. Perhaps this means that as part of our theological formation, we actually visit the church in Lebanon or Pakistan or Turkey – we visit as learners, to ask how the church has and can be faithful to the Gospel but also live with integrity and grace and resilience in such a time or situation.

What might we learn from this voice or source?

As indicated, it would surely include a greater appreciation of what it means to be the persecuted church. The church in the west has more or less assumed that persecution is the mark of the church, perhaps, but the church far away – not the church in the West. But, increasing we need to come to a greater learning from the witness of the martyrs and that this witness needs to inform our own faith and practice. And this means that we learn, in the language of 1 Peter, to know persecution and are even blessed in the suffering because we are doing right (1 Peter 3:14). We must be wise and discerning and not get caught in and claim that we are being persecuted when we are less than astute. Let us avoid claiming that we are being persecuted when we are simply being less than wise.

Then second, another learning from these minority church communities, while there are certainly those in such situations who choose to seem themselves as embattled warriors against the dominant religious or ideological voice of their region or nation, it is my impression that those Christian communities who are most effective in their witness choose to live as good neighbours, good citizens, who seek common cause with those of other religious or ideological conviction. I think for example of Lebanon where there are Christian groups who demonize Islam. But I wonder if it is more fruitful to do what others have and are doing: to actually view Islam as a potential ally. To learn together and from one another; and to advocate together with civic authorities for what both religious traditions recognize as a crucial human and thus societal value. There is a theological school just outside of Beirut, for example, that has an annual Christian-Islam dialogue, with local imams invited to the campus for conversation and shared learning. And this is viewed not as a threat to Christian identity but as an essential part of living faithfully as a minority presence in Lebanon.

And third – still learning from the minority churches -- I could here also echo the comments made about the early church: that the passing on of the faith from one generation to the next takes on particular urgency. We would learn to become masters of nurturing our children in the faith when the society at large does not in any way reinforce that teaching. And thus to stress again: it may mean that we recover the ancient practice of catechesis.

I thus wonder if our ministerial formation needs to include either actual visits to minority churches where we come as learners but also that our curriculum include the written works – publications – from those whose writing comes from such a social and cultural position – works that are clearly written from the margins of a society: that we are reading Indian and Middle Eastern theologians and spiritual writers. For myself, as I young pastor I discovered the work of

Kosuke Koyama, Japanese theologian who spent many years in Thailand. But I offer this as but one example of such a voice or perspective.

Churches in Western European Secular Societies

Fourth, another source of learning and wisdom is from the church in those regions or societies that are already secular and have perhaps been so for quite some time.

Here I am thinking in particular of the church in Central and Western Europe – societies where the Christian faith was perhaps a given, a dominant presence and even the “state religion” but where now church buildings are mere artifacts of a previous golden age at best. Recently I was in conversation with a pastor who moved to Canada from a pastoral appointment in Amsterdam. And I was struck by his comment: “I have seen our future.” He is but one pointing to the reality that those of us doing ministry in North America would do well to learn from those who are ahead of us on the curve towards secularism. To learn how the church, in a post-Christian society, sustains vitality in its worship and its witness.

To read, perhaps, Thomas Halik – from the Czech Republic – with his keen insights into the nature of faith in this kind of social context. See for example his: *Night of the Confessor: Christian Faith in an age of Uncertainty*.

To attend to the wisdom of former Archbishop Rowan Williams – so much of what he offers, but I think especially his appreciation of the call to the church to eschew violence. There are so many publications here, but I think in particular of what he has written on Fyodor Dostoevski² and his *The Truce of God*.

And of course, to read the one who saw all of this coming – back in the 19th century, no less – Soren Kierkegaard. Now more relevant than ever, particularly when he speaks to the nature of faith.

The most pertinent voice in this regard, as many have recognized, is that of Bishop Leslie Newbigin. His *Gospel in a Pluralist Society* is but one of his many powerful contributions to this conversation.³ It reflects the wisdom of both life and ministry in India, in a minority position and the vantage point of post-Christian Europe.

Ministerial Practices.

What I am suggesting in all of this is that in the theological formation of lay church leaders and clergy that we accept that we are living and working in a secular society and we will intentionally foster a disposition, an orientation, that views this as not necessarily all negative but perhaps actually part of the calling and missional purposes of God. And that in this, we learn

² Rowan Williams, *Dostoevski: Language, Faith and Fiction* (Baylor University Press, 2011).

³ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Eerdmans, 1989).

from and draw on the wisdom of others who might give us guidance as we navigate this set of circumstances:

- The Old Testament prophets, particularly those who wrote to the people of Judah in exile or who were part of the exile;
- The experience and wisdom of the Early Church – the pre-Christendom church;
- The perspective of those who have historically been a minority Christian presence in their countries; and,
- The guidance of those who are already in a more secular society, most notably those who represent the church in post-Christian Western Europe.

And what would we learn? Without doubt there are particular skills or capacities that are pertinent to this generation of Christian leaders. In saying this I would insist that we always sustain a full orb ed theological formation: immersion in the Scriptures and in the Christian theological tradition along with personal spiritual personal formation in the faith. We always keep a commitment to formation in the basic capacities for ministry: preaching, teaching, pastoral care and liturgical leadership.

In other words, we surely need to avoid all the pressure points that might come our way to short-change our students out of some sense of urgency. We need to insist that our students need a full-orbed theological and pastoral formation. I would even go so far as to say that the MDiv has never been so crucial and that the full academic and intellectual process of rigorous study has never been so vital for the life and ministry of the church.

But might we also ask what it would be to provide theological formation for this time in particular – for such a time as this? What would look like, to use the image of William T. Cavanaugh, to view the church as not so much a hospital as a field hospital [*Field Hospital: The Church's Engagement with a Wounded World*; Eerdmans, 2015]. I am taken with the suggestion that we are not so much in the work of preparing medical doctors for the hospitals of our cities, but for ministry that is much more like the work of “Doctors without Borders”?

I am going to suggest four particular capacities or skills that we need to be cultivating. This is not exhaustive! I would merely like to highlight these four; others, I am sure, will mention other capacities that are surely essential for ministerial leadership at this time. But, here are my four --

- (1) Preaching for Monday morning – preaching that assumes that the kingdom of God is happening not so much Sunday morning as Monday morning and that in our preaching we have a view to the marketplace – the schools, businesses, art galleries, and legislative assemblies of our society. Cultivating preaching that has a vivid connection to the world and equips women and men to be agents of peace in that world [as they, in the language of Jeremiah 29, seek the peace of the city]. Yes, of course, we preach the whole counsel of God. But what I am suggesting here is that we foster the capacity to preach in a way that encourages preachers to think and speak in light of where their hearers will be from

Monday to Friday and with a few to empowering them to be actively engaged within their social and cultural contexts.

- (2) Advocacy for and skill in fostering just communities. I do not see how we can serve faithfully in our time without some measure of understanding of the economic consequences of our preaching and the ministry of the church and that therefore ministerial formation includes the basics of the economics of the towns and communities and cities of which we are a part. Preaching that is blind to the fundamentals of the economy is naïve at best and irresponsible at worst . . . or perhaps worse than that, actually complicit in unjust economic structures and systems.
- (3) Peace making. While the church has always been called to peace making, it may be that this is the particular calling of the church in a post-Christian society. Our communities and the society at large are caught up in conflict on so many different levels that it is amazing that society still actually functions. Our legislative assemblies are venues of conflict and discord, not collaboration and principled compromise. When we hear about conflict, on a national or local level, whether it be political, racial, economic or religious, would it not be wonderful that our leaders – clergy and lay – know that they have the skills of mediation, of fostering ways and means for those in conflict to come to understanding and some measure of reconciliation.
- (4) Liturgical leadership that is not escapist. Pastors need to know how to bring the pain of the world into the heart of our worship. Recently the Province of Alberta where I live was blind-sided by a horrific wildfire that cut through several communities but most notably the city of Fort MacMurray. 88,000 people were evacuated. The Sunday following this massive evacuation I was the guest preacher at an Evangelical church in the province. And I was stunned that they did not offer prayers or commentary or mourning or anything of substance to help the worshipping community process what had happened. The worship leaders likely only knew how to lead in a few happy-clappy songs; but they had no capacity – no sensibility – that would help them lead the congregation in prayer for those who had been evacuated for the crews who were still fighting the fire. They did not know how to mourn or express perplexity before God or cry on God to intervene. My point is that we desperately need liturgical leadership that knows how to bring the deep pain of society at large and the individual person or family into worship. And there is, of course, no better guide to this kind worship than the Old Testament Psalms.

When the mayor of our city thinks about the university and seminary of which I am a part – in this case, our mayor in Calgary is an Ismaili Muslim – what comes to mind for him? What does he associate us with? What are his perceptions of us?

Well, I would like it to be the following:

- That he knows that we are seeking the well-being of the city and that as a religious community we are empowering and equipping folks to see the good – the civic good – the peace of the city;
- That he would know that we are deeply committed to justice, to advocacy for the poor and that we will challenge unjust social structures . . . and that if this makes him uncomfortable, so be it;
- That he would know that he can call upon us to be instruments of peace – finding just peace, and means towards peace – for those in conflict; that we would be masters of the art of mediation; and,
- That in our worship we feel the pain of the city and pray for the city.

We are seeking the peace – the shalom – peace with justice, peace as flourishing, peace as the resolution of conflict, peace as radical empathy with the pain of the city.

Spiritual Practice for the Church in a Secular Society: The Call to “Interiority.”

But then also, we need to speak not only of the intellectual and ministerial formation for such a time as this, we also need to speak to this question: what does spiritual formation look like in our time.

And here I am going to lean into the wisdom and insight of Louis Dupre former professor of the philosophy of religion at Yale University.[“Seeking Christian Interiority: An Interview with Louis Dupre”, *Christian Century* July 16-23, 1997, pp.654 – 660]. Dupre speaks directly to the phenomena – the secularism of our time – and then he references the remark of Karl Rahner “that Christianity in the future will be mystical or it will be not at all.”[p. 655]. He notes the significance of this observation and then stresses that “To survive as a genuine believer, the Christian must now personally integrate what tradition did in the past” (655). Or, I would add, that the Christian and the church will need to cultivate the capacity to be deeply Christian when this is not reinforced by the social context and cultural sensibilities in which one is living. We will need to develop deeply religious sensibilities – the capacity to live with a deep appreciation of life in the Spirit that fosters our capacity to live in dynamic union with Christ (John 15.4).

Dupre observes that this will involve developing an interiority – not as an way of being disengaged from our society, but as a means of fostering the very spiritual resources that will equip us and empower us to so very engaged in our culture. As he puts it, “Even the contemplative is responsible for the civilization in which he or she lives” (657). Or later, he notes: “A genuine Christian interiority must provide the inspiration for a humanism capable of living a vigorous, free and open life within one’s culture, whatever its condition may be . . . insisting, indeed, that, and I quote:

The spiritual Christian is not involved in constant polemics with the surrounding secular world. Since that person's force and strength comes from within, he or she can grant society and culture their full autonomy. (p. 657)

This is a rather liberating observation, actually. We are not wringing our hands or bemoaning our state, but rather – at peace with God's purposes, our world and ourselves – we can be true to our Christian calling and live with the potential for minds that are set on things above [to use the language of the book of Colossians]. In response, I would suggest that theological education and leadership formation needs to include the cultivation of the practices and sensibilities that will include:

- (1) A recovery and full embrace of the practices of prayer and discernment, the capacities to live with a deep awareness of the inner witness of the Spirit, in and through our prayers, something that we will learn even as we lean into the masters of discernment in our Christian heritage and as we learn, as did the ancient church, to allow the Psalms, as Dupre notes, with regard to Henri Nouwen . . . that he “had the Psalms always nearby to bring ‘before God’ the passing moods and attitudes of the day”
- (2) A reaffirmation of the vital place of the sacraments in the life of the church and of the individual Christian – something that the pre-Christian church recognized as vital but which Calvin and Wesley viewed as indispensable to the life of the church and to their own lives, sufficient that for Wesley it was his pattern to communion twice a week [see his sermon, “The Duty of Constant Communion.”] which is but another way of reminding us that true mysticism is deeply grounded in the tangible and concrete acts of the Christ-ordained acts of baptism and the church [side note: our insistence on sustaining a once-a-month, first Sunday of the month observance of the Table is simply nothing other than naivete . . . and the failure to give grace to those who so urgently need food for the road in a secular age].
- (3) A reaffirmation that while critical biblical study is essential to the life of the church for both lay leadership and clergy, equally essential is the spiritual practice of reading the Scriptures with an open and eager heart, eager to “receive the Word with joy given by the Holy Spirit (see 1 Thess 1), which suggests to us the ancient practice of meditation.
- (4) And, a reaffirmation that our personal interior practice needs structures and forms of accountability – including spiritual friendship and spiritual direction – ways and means by which our interior life is nurtured and strengthened by grace-filled conversation and by which we are actually accountable for our interior lives, not living isolation but living and working with and wrestling with our inner demons while attending to the work of the Spirit in our lives, while in the company of others.

And perhaps I also need to add this. The spiritual resources into which we will lean and on which we will draw will certainly include the wisdom and insights and admonitions from our respective theological and spiritual traditions. Wesleyans will read Wesley; Mennonites will read Anabaptist sources; Reformed church leaders will be reading spiritual guides in that tradition. But what perhaps must also be said is that we will also learn to draw on the wisdom from each other's wells – with Catholic Christians reading Luther and Calvin, Evangelicals

reading John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, Christians in the West reading Orthodox writers all with this conviction that perhaps no tradition has all the spiritual resources we need to live in these challenging times.

Conclusion

As may be self-evident, this articulation of what it might be to form pastors and church leaders in our day would by implication conclude that there is nothing to gain and everything to lose by shorting the process – by any kind of inclination to think that church leaders in our day need less theological and spiritual formation than a generation ago. More than anything, a full orbed theological program of study, complemented by a richly textured approach to spiritual formation is indispensable for our ministerial candidates. We do not serve the church well and we do not serve prospective church leaders well by suggesting to them that shorten and abbreviated approaches to ministerial formation are adequate for our day.