

# LIVING THEOLOGICALLY: TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN PRACTICE

BY R. PAUL STEVENS

*I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen—not only because I see it but because by it I see everything else.*

— C.S. Lewis

Living theologically—my title is an oxymoron, like black light, constructive criticism, or servant leadership—two ideas that normally do not belong together. What has theology to do with everyday life?

Theology is usually considered an abstract discipline. It is rational, reducible to propositions, and capable of being categorized (liberal, conservative, evangelical, Reformed, liberation). It is not usually thought of as practical. People in business, law, the professions and the trades often regard the study of theology as a process of becoming progressively irrelevant. The hardest words of critique are offered by insiders. For example, Lesslie Newbigin says:

*Christian men and women who are deeply involved in secular affairs view theology as the arcane pursuit of professional clergymen. This withdrawal of theology from the world of secular affairs is made all the more complete by the work of biblical scholars whose endlessly fascinating exercises have made it appear to the lay Christian that no one untrained in their methods can really understand anything the Bible says. We are in*

*a situation analogous to one about which the great Reformers complained....<sup>1</sup>*

Theology! God-words. God-study. God-thought.

Then there is life! Everyday life. Getting up in the morning life. Paying the bills life. Watching a hockey game life. Trying to find a job life. Trying to say ‘I love you’ to your spouse life. Raising a family in a postmodern culture life. Computers, credit cards, freeways, gridlock, virtual reality, nunning a small business, movies, the economy, racial tension, sexual appetite, recession, radar imaging from satellites, fashion, television, ambition, workaholism, debt, prayer, Bible study, theological discourse—what do these have in common?

It should be obvious that I am pleading for a different definition of theology than what is commonly thought, one closer to the Bible.<sup>2</sup> Such is supplied by the Puritan William Perkins, who said, ‘Theology is the science of living blessedly forever’.<sup>3</sup> J.I. Packer, in the same tradition, says that theology is for achieving God’s glory (honour and praise) and humankind’s good (the godliness that is true humanness) through every life-activity.<sup>4</sup> If these definitions come close to capturing the biblical approach to theological education then the only theology that is truly Christian is one being applied. I would not want to be a professor of unapplied theology! One reason is that the movement of the Bible is always from the indicative to the imperative, from doctrine to duty, from kerygma to didache, from theology to ethics, from revealed truth to extraordinary living. Francis of Assisi once said that humankind has as much knowledge as it has executed. That means that what you really know—in the fully biblical and Hebraic sense—is what you live. You have passed some examinations and written some academic papers. But these are trivial tests compared with life itself. For example, James Houston recently suggested at a pastors’ conference that the curriculum vitae of a pastor is usually written on the face of his wife. There was a stunned silence among the predominantly male audience.

In this paper I will explore the life—theology connection by looking through three lenses, each providing a way of looking at the rich connection designed by God but largely fragmented in contemporary theological education.

## 1. ORTHODOXY

Orthodoxy is made up of two words, one of which meaning ‘straight’ or ‘right’ (from which we get the English word orthodontist, the person who makes straight teeth) and the Greek word for ‘glory’ or ‘worship’—*doxa*. Doctrine that lines itself up (*ortho*) with Scripture is designed to be a blessing to everyday life and, at the same time, to bless God (*doxa*) in life itself. It aims, as Packer says, at true godliness that is true humanness.

### *Redeeming the routine* <sup>5</sup>

The whole of our life has the glorious prospect of living out the great doctrines of the faith. The doctrine of the Trinity, for example, directs God-imaging creatures to live relationally. Those who proclaim that God is love are invited to be included in the love-life of God and so become lovers themselves ([Jn. 17:21](#)). To believe in God the creator is to accept trusteeship of the earth. The incarnation revolutionizes our attitude to things and promotes a radical Christian materialism. The atonement equips us to live mercifully. Ecclesiology evokes the experience of peoplehood, living as the *laos* of God rather than a bouquet of individual believers. Eschatology teaches us to view time as a gift of God rather than a resource to be managed.

All of this involves straight thought. Far from denigrating thought, the Bible invites us to love God with our minds ([Mt. 22:37](#)) by thinking comprehensively (taking the whole into consideration, including paradox, ambiguity and the aesthetic), thinking critically (not allowing our minds to be conformed to this age), thinking devotedly (by taking captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ—[2 Cor. 10:5](#)). The

fruit of such thinking should be a blessing for everyday life. Thinking Christianly is part of the ‘science of living blessedly forever’.

### *The danger of unapplied theology*

But orthodoxy involves more than merely speaking correctly *about* God. We could do that and still be damned, like the friends of Job—Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar—who spoke with impeccable correctness about God but in the end received God’s judgment: ‘I am angry with you [Eliphaz] and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has’ ([Job 42:7](#)). Remarkably, God judged Job as orthodox and his friends (who could have had degrees from both Fuller and Regent) as heretics. Why? It is not only a fascinating question but a vital one.

A careful study of the book of Job reveals that the only authentic theologian in the book was Job himself. The reason is sublimely simple: while the friends talked *about* God, Job talked *to* God. P.T. Forsyth says that ‘the best theology is compressed prayer’.<sup>6</sup> While Job’s friends delivered their lectures about God, Job talked to God, and in so speaking—with all his holy boldness—he spoke well of God. His theology was orthodox. We will return to this later.

The danger of mere intellectual orthodoxy is that we are tempted to think we can manage God. Our doctrines then become idols—static, fixed and inflexible. According to [Psalm 115:8](#), ‘those who make [such idols] will be like them’. They will become people who are static, inflexible and unsurprising. In contrast, the Lord ‘does whatever pleases him’ (115:3). And those who worship the Lord become free and spontaneous. God can never be contained by the human mind. If he could then God would be too puny a God to be worshipped. The point of theology is to understand God (to stand *under* God in reverent awe), not to over-stand God by attempting to control him through theological discourse. Much that passes for theological education is the extension of the tree of knowledge of good and evil through history offering the temptation to transcend our creatureliness. True worship

is the opposite invitation. Orthodoxy welcomes mystery and confesses with Job, ‘these are but the outskirts of his ways’ ([Job 26:14](#) kjv). As Robert Capon said: ‘The work of theology in our day is not so much interpretation as contemplation ... God and the world need to be held up for oohs and ahhs before they can be safely analyzed. Theology begins with admiration, not problems.’<sup>7</sup> So orthodoxy is about worshipful living.

### ***Truthful living for God’s glory***

Doctrine that does not lead to doxology is demonic ([Jas. 2:19](#)). That is why those who set out together on a theological education experience are on a dangerous journey. We must make sure we are heading in the right (orthodox) direction. The goal of biblical theological education is to increase our love for God and to make us more human. For this reason the academy must work in partnership with the church and the marketplace since there is in these real-life ministry and life situations a built-in reality check. More important, there is a built-in love check. We cannot learn to love the church as Christ does ([Eph. 5:25](#)) without being in both Christ and the church. The church cannot be loved *in absentia* the way some people get their degrees. The congregation is essential for our God-given goal of forming people who will worship God through preaching, examining a balance sheet, preparing a family meal, praying with a friend, pruning their rose bushes, and equipping the saints.<sup>8</sup> According to Ephesians the purpose of congregation and life-based education is that the saints will live for the praise of God’s glory (1:12, 14)—that is, to live doxologically.

So, looking at the theology and everyday life connection through the lens of orthodoxy, we see that the great doctrines of the faith beg for application. They bless everyday life. They point us simultaneously to the adoration of God and to the possibility of living a genuinely human existence. But we must now look through a second lens—orthopraxy—to discover what is involved in the connection of theology and daily life. Orthopraxy literally means right or straight practice.

## 2. ORTHOPRAXY

We are in desperate need today of a theology of good works, especially evangelicals. We are saved by grace and not by works—that is the gospel. Further, faith without works is dead—and that is part of the gospel too. But how can people saved by grace work? What is right practice? When is a work Christian?

### *Humanizing theological living*

Is it evangelism, preaching, pastoral care, counselling—all the subjects loosely called ‘applied theology’ or ‘ministry division’ courses? I can only point in passing to the fine piece of analysis done on right practice by Craig Dykstra.<sup>9</sup> Dykstra notes the ubiquitous tension between the so-called academic fields of theology, Bible, history, ethics (disciplines in which practice is thought to have no intrinsic place)—and the applied theology division which is often relegated, in some people’s minds, to ‘how to’ techniques for clergy. It is now widely recognized in theological circles that we must break out of the dichotomy of practical skills and theoretical knowledge. Perhaps we will never resolve the tension. Indeed, we may better speak of useful and fruitful tension as we work on integration. As we do this we can put the question differently along these lines: what is theological about praxis and what is practical about theology?

In contrast to the dichotomizing of theology and practice in the theological academy today, the NT presupposes a community in which every person is a theologian of application, trying to make sense out of his or her life in order to live for the praise of God’s glory.<sup>10</sup> On the most basic level orthopraxy is about practices that are in harmony with God’s kingdom in the church and world, that bring value and good into the world. It is not obvious, however, that one cannot do the doctrine fully in a classroom or library, or learn the doctrine in the classroom and do it later. Instead of training for ministry and then going into it, we assume you should not ‘go into the ministry’ unless you are already ‘in it’. The best education is education *in* ministry and not just *for* it. It

is transformative not preparatory.<sup>11</sup> Behind this is an important principle of spiritual theology: any attempt to know God apart from the activities of life is unreal.<sup>12</sup> My own experience is illustrative. After two years in theological college I was suffering from academic burn-out. My wife and I moved into the slums of Montreal and tried to serve God in an inner-city church while I continued my M. Div. part-time. This rejuvenated my theological education. I engaged every course with questions that came out of daily ministry and our immersion in the poverty of the city. This points to a truth we must explore, that there is more to orthopraxis than application. There is revelation and illumination.

### *Knowing through doing*

There is a growing critique of the traditional linear, cause—effect approach in theological education: first you get the theology and then you apply it. In contrast, we must aim at a circle of learning: theory expressed in practice, which leads to deeper theoretical/theological reflection, which leads to praxis again, and on it goes. We should speak of this as a spiral of learning as we keep re-entering each phase at a deeper level.<sup>13</sup> Obviously by relegating praxis to the post-academy experience we are shortchanging learning. Perhaps this is easier to grasp in Africa or Asia than in the West. The orthodoxy—orthopraxy tension in the West reflects the intrinsic dualism of Western civilization, and the lingering effects of the Enlightenment.

In contrast, the Bible invites us to wholistic living that embraces propositional truth, as well as truth learned through image, imagination and action, all a seamless robe. For example, the apostle Paul hammered out his doctrine of justification by faith in the context of the Gentile mission. He was a missionary theologian. Ray S. Anderson notes, ‘Paul’s theology and mission were directed more by the Pentecost event which unleashed the Spirit of Christ through apostolic witness rather than through apostolic office. This praxis of Pentecost became for Paul the “school” for theological reflection.’<sup>14</sup> The gospels point to the same unity of knowledge. Many of the commands

of Jesus link revelation with obedience: 'If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love' ([Jn. 15:10](#)); 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples' (8:31); 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death' (8:51). Sometimes Jesus invited people to 'believe this'; more often Jesus said 'do this and you will live' ([Lk. 10:28](#); see also [Mt. 19:21](#)). Especially in the Gospel of Luke Jesus teaches that obedient action is the organ of further revelation. If they do not obey the law and the prophets, he said, 'they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead' ([Lk. 16:31](#)). He puts these words on the lips of Abraham in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus and proclaims that even his resurrection from the grave will have no evidential apologetic value if they are not acting on the light they have. We know more through doing what we already know.

Biblical theological education is not inert theology and unreflective action but 'praxis-laden theory' and 'theory-laden praxis'.<sup>15</sup> Immanuel Kant said something similar when he offered the maxim that experience without theory is blind but theory without experience is mere intellectual play.<sup>16</sup> What we can learn by doing is much more than simple technique. Every action has implicit theory just as every theory has implicit action. So theological reflection *in* ministry or a societal occupation is essential to living theologically. But in these things we are not trying to squeeze blood from a rock. Daily life is bursting with theological meaning just as theological truth is laden with blessing for daily life. God can be known and loved through praxis in the realities of everyday life. What a strange marriage psychology would require one to love fully and only then to kiss, rather than to kiss in order to love! What a strange perversion of the Christian life that would forbid one to act until one knows, and not act in order to know! We are formed theologically not only by reading and reasoning but by action and by service.

My own story may be illustrative. I abandoned professional ministry at thirty-eight years of age, took up the trade of carpentry for five years and planted a church. It proved to be a theological education

immersion experience. I learned theology through that.<sup>17</sup> I prayed as much as a carpenter as I did as a pastor, possibly more, because I was so frequently beyond my comfort zone. But the experience deepened my theology and spirituality. Indeed, as Eberhard Jüngel said, ‘Everything can become the theme of theology on the basis of its relation to God.’<sup>18</sup> In this we have a clue to our basic question—what makes practice Christian?

### *Inside Christian practice*

What makes an activity Christian is not the husk but the heart. Preaching, caring for the flock and equipping the saints can be profoundly secular. Listening to a child, designing a software package, and examining a balance sheet can be profoundly Christian. What makes a work Christian is faith, hope and love. This is a crucial point. Orthopraxy is not merely accomplished by the skilful performance of ministerial duties like leading Bible studies, praying for the sick and doing acts of justice. This misunderstanding has seduced many non-clergy laity to aspire to ministerial duties in order to be ‘doing ministry’. They become paraclergy instead of regarding their ordinary service in the world as full-time ministry. It is not the religious character of the work that makes service Christian but the interiority of it. William Tyndale said, ‘There is no work better than another to please God; to pour water, to wash dishes, to be a souter [cobbler], or an apostle, all are one, as touching the deed, to please God.’<sup>19</sup> I can preach a sermon to impress people; I can fix our shower door at home for the glory of God. I have probably done both. The difference is faith.

Luther deals with this brilliantly in his *Treatise on Good Works*. He uses the analogy of husband and wife as an example of the Christian practices that spring from gospel confidence. Where the husband is confident of his acceptance he does not have to do big things to win his wife’s favour. In the same way the person who lives by the gospel ‘simply serves God with no thought of reward, content that his service pleases God. On the other hand, he who is not at one with God, or is in a state of doubt, worries and starts looking for ways and means to do

enough and to influence God with his many good works'.<sup>20</sup> Faith defines orthopraxy. Faith by definition cannot be calculating, or even self-evaluative, just as the eye cannot look at itself, designed as it is for looking at another. When the eye is single or sound the whole of one's bodily life is filled with the light of Christ ([Lk. 11:34–36](#)). Life centred on God transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary so we discover what Alfons Auer described as 'the sense of *transparency in worldly matters*'.<sup>21</sup>

The unselfconsciousness of such faith is the matter raised by the disturbing parable of the sheep and the goats ([Mt. 25:31–46](#)). The unrighteous protest that if they had seen Jesus in the poor, hungry or stranger, even if they had known Jesus was disguised in the poor, they would gladly have done a service directly to the Lord. So the unrighteous are surprised that their failure to love their neighbour was a failure to love Jesus. They would have gladly done Christian practices for Jesus but not for others! Apparently that is not enough. In contrast the righteous found to their exquisite surprise that what they did not regard as a ministry to Jesus (but just loving their neighbour) turned out to be a Christian practice approved by the Lord. They too protest, 'Lord, when did we see you, hungry, naked and thirsty, and feed you?' Jesus says, 'Whatever you did for one of the least of these my brothers, you did for me' (25:40). We onlookers are caught up in the parable and are surprised also by the implication that compassionate actions (surely intrinsically Christian practices) are Christian precisely because they did not have a spiritual reward in view! They are Christian, Luther would say, because they arise from gospel confidence, from the generosity of a heart set free by acceptance in Christ. It is this element of surprise for which we are least prepared when we ponder the parable. Perhaps the purpose of theological education is to set us up to be as surprised as the righteous on the day of judgment to discover we acted in love without knowing it was for and to Jesus.

True Christian action—orthopraxy—is gratuitous, free from contrivance, free from a calculating spirit, free from contract—I do this

for God and he does that for me. Orthopractic living is essentially spontaneous. With Jesus in our hearts we love because there is someone in need, not to gain approval by God or to receive the benefits of Christian action. This is the issue behind the question that dominates the book of Job. Satan said, ‘Does Job serve God for nothing?’ ([Job 1:9](#)). In the end our own service to God can be tested by the same probing question. One of the great lessons of the book of Job is this: Job proves that faith is not for the this-life benefits of having faith. Not for healing (indeed he never even prays for healing); not for the restoration of his fortunes (this comes after he meets God again). Faith is for the glory of God. Christian practice, whether developing a compensation package for a business or empowering the poor, is for God’s glory. The South American liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez comments on this insightfully (and remarkably in view of his theological orientation):

The truth that [Job] has grasped and that has lifted him to the level of contemplation is that justice alone does not have the final say about how we are to speak of God. Only when we have come to realize that God’s love is freely bestowed do we enter fully and definitively into the presence of the God of faith ... God’s love, like all true love, operates in a world not of cause and effect but of freedom and gratuitiveness.<sup>22</sup>

Orthopraxy is action in harmony with God’s purposes in which we can discover God and his truth. Orthopraxy is not necessarily clerical, though it includes the work of the pastor. Whether washing dishes or preaching, being a cobbler or an apostle, ‘all is one, as touching the deed, to please God’. Orthopraxis is not measured by excellence, by efficiency, or by its religious character, but by faith, hope and love. We must cultivate the heart and not merely the husk of such action. But that points to a third lens through which to investigate the theology—life connection: orthopathy.

Orthopathy literally means right passion. The word was coined by Dr Richard Mouw. There is also a hint in the writings of the Jewish author

Abraham Heschel who said the prophets embodied the divine pathos, that is, what God cares for.

### **3. ORTHOPATHY**

The cultivation of the heart—a more wholistic way of knowing—is the very thing our postmodern culture is inviting.<sup>23</sup> But the biblical response to the postmodern challenge is not to abandon reason but to allow God to evangelize our hearts as well as our heads, to care for what God cares for. As Micah said, ‘He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God’ ([Mi. 6:8](#)). How can theological education cultivate these? Such orthopathic education would require healing the fragmentation of theological knowledge and recovering the view promoted in the Middle Ages that theology is a *habitus*,<sup>24</sup> a disposition of the soul. As a practical knowledge of God unifying head and heart, theology has the character of wisdom. But where do we get wisdom?

#### ***Educating the heart***

It is often conceded that the academy cannot be a solo educator, but there is little evidence that the academy needs the home, the congregation and the marketplace, though all four are linked by God in a daily life system for learning. The first school, of course, is the home. The congregation and the academy are poor substitutes when it comes to the education of the heart. I refer to my own orthopathic education in a story I develop in *Disciplines of the Hungry Heart*.

Though my parents never intended it, their spiritual nurturing included exposing me to the ministry of the poor to the rich. They built our lovely family home on a three-acre plot next door to a one-room shack without water, electricity, indoor plumbing or a furnace. Albert Jupp lived with his aged and ill mother in that smelly, dank shack. As he was occupied with the care of his mother, Albert was unable to hold down a steady job. Somehow he eked out an existence beside the

Stevens, his rich next-door neighbours. Today the rich hardly see the poor except on television or from an air-conditioned tour bus.

Each night Albert would get a pail of water at our outside tap, which was always kept running, even in the dead of winter when our neighbours had their taps safely protected from freezing. My mother was one of the most generous souls on earth, and her sensitive conscience would not allow her to set a fine meal before our family without thinking of Albert and his mother. So night after night I was asked to make a pilgrimage up the hill to the shack with two portions from our table for our poor neighbours. I confess that as a teenager I usually resented doing this. But what I think was bothering me was how that nightly visit to the Jupps made me think about my own existence as a rich young man. Daily I was confronted existentially with the truth that the rich cannot know God well without relating to the poor. My neighbour made an evangelical invitation to my heart.

In a remarkable series of seven sermons on the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the fourth-century Church Father John Chrysostom addressed the illusions of wealth. In these prophetic sermons, Chrysostom argues that the rich are not owners of their wealth but stewards for the poor.<sup>25</sup> Appealing to the prophets of the OT ([Mal. 3:8–10](#)), Chrysostom warns about the spiritual dangers of the rich. ‘The most pitiable person of all’, he says, ‘is the one who lives in luxury and shares his goods with nobody.’<sup>26</sup> In contrast, ‘*by nourishing Christ in poverty here and laying up great profit hereafter we will be able to attain the good things which are to come*’.<sup>27</sup> In this last quotation Chrysostom hints that ministering to the poor simultaneously heals the hearts of the rich and nourishes Jesus. What should be observed is the truth that God has provided for the education of our hearts in love and compassion through our everyday family experiences and through our neighbour. Both are a means of grace.

## *Neighbour as educator*

As we have already seen, the neighbour becomes a means of grace precisely when the neighbour is taken seriously as neighbour and not as a means of grace! We cannot simply deal with the poor, the stranger and the outsider in principle, or engage in theoretical or strategic considerations of how to care for our global neighbours. It is in the context of actual neighbour-relationships that we are invited to live the life of faith. It is precisely in the unplanned and uncontrollable circumstances of our lives that we can find God and be found by him. Bonhoeffer spoke to this with great depth in a conversation he reports he had with a young French pastor.

I discovered later, and I'm still discovering right up to this moment, that it is only by living completely in this world that one learns to have faith.... By this worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities. In so doing we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God.<sup>28</sup>

We find God (and get our hearts educated) in the centre of life rather than the circumference. This was the case for Job.

## *Passion for God*

Job is a stunning example of orthopathy. His school was his life. He, like David, was a man after God's own heart. As he went through test after test, sometimes with obvious weariness, Job began to want God more than he wanted health. Indeed—and this is seldom noted—Job never asked for healing. What he wanted was the friendship of God ([Job 29:4](#)). So most of Job's speeches are directed to God, inquiring of God, challenging God, exploring God, demanding of God, confronting God with holy persistence ([Jas. 5:11](#)). At times I think his orthodox friends with degrees from Regent and Fuller may have hid under the table expecting God to liquidate him for his impertinence. But in the end the God-talkers were condemned and Job was justified, being blessed with a first-hand experience of God (42:5). Was this because

Job spoke well of God (the primary theological task) *by speaking to him boldly, with passionate faith* (the primary theological method)?

Job used his experience of the absence of God in order to know God better. P.T. Forsyth once said, ‘Prayer is to the religious life what original research is for science—by it we get direct contact with reality.’<sup>29</sup> Job was not a half-hearted researcher. He took God on, like Abraham pleading, Jacob refusing to let God go until he had blessed him, like the Syro-Phoenician woman begging for crumbs under the table, like Paul asking three times for the thorn to be removed, like—dare we say it?—Jesus in the garden exploring his own heart options with the Father until he could freely do the Father’s will through submission rather than compliance. Job withstanding God, wrestling with God, extracting revelation from God and in the end knowing God—is this orthopathy? Is this proof positive that the kingdom of God is not for the mildly interested but the desperate? God-knowers (orthodox, orthopractic theologians) will ‘take’ the kingdom by violent, passionate (orthopathic) faith ([Mt. 11:12](#)). Luther described the qualifications of a theologian this way: ‘living, or rather dying and being damned make a theologian, not understanding, reading or speculating’.<sup>30</sup> By undergoing the torment of the cross, death and hell, true theology and the knowledge of God come about. Job, the OT theologian, would say ‘Amen’. Caring for what concerns God, caring for God’s concerns in daily life, and caring for God above all—this is orthopathy.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

Orthodoxy. Orthopraxy. Orthopathy. All three point to the marriage of theology and everyday life: theology and life linked in praise (orthodoxy), practice (orthopraxy) and passion (orthopathy). What God therefore has joined together let no theological institution put asunder.

Might not the most pernicious heresy in the church today be the disharmony between those who claim to be theologically approved but live as practical atheists? Is the greatest challenge not graduating from Regent or Fuller, but in the end, at the conclusion of our life-long theological education, having the Lord say, 'I know you'? Would not the most fearful failure be to have God say, 'I never knew you' ([Mt. 7:23; 25:12](#))?

One of the Desert Fathers was approached by an eager young student who said, 'Abba, give me a word from God.' The wise mentor asked if the student would agree not to come back until he had fully lived the word.

'Yes,' the eager young student said.

'Then this is the word of God: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind." ' The young man disappeared, it seemed forever.

Twenty-five years later the student had the temerity to come back. 'I have lived the word you gave. Do you have another word?'

'Yes,' said the Desert Father. 'But once again you must not come back until you have lived it.'

'I agree.'

'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

The student never came back.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 142–143.

<sup>2</sup> The working definition of theological education developed within the Coalition for the Ministry in Daily Life is as follows: ‘Theological education for all the people of God is the life-long, life-based (rooted in life and not abstracted), and life-oriented (directed toward the totality of life) process of forming and transforming persons, communities, organizations and institutions into Christian maturity for the purpose of serving God and God’s purposes in the world’ (‘Consultation on Ministry in Daily Life: Task Group Report’, 14 November, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> *The Golden Chain* (1592), in Ian Breward (ed.), *The Work of William Perkins* (Appelford: Courtney Press, 1970), p. 177.

<sup>4</sup> From a lecture at Regent College, Vancouver, B.C., September 1992.

<sup>5</sup> This is the title of the excellent book by my friend Robert Banks (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> P.T. Forsyth, *The Soul of Prayer* (London: The Independent Press, 1916/1954), p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Farrar Capon, *An Offering of Uncles: The Priesthood of Adam and the Shape of the World* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), p. 163.

<sup>8</sup> A strand of witness through the OT and NT points to education in the thick of life and in the context of daily ministry: the family as the primary educational unit; the reinforcement of public festivals; structured patterns of instruction through creeds and stories; the schools of the prophets; congregational instruction in the synagogue; the disciple community around Jesus engaged in action as well as withdrawal for reflection; Paul’s travelling seminary with his missionary co-workers (Timothy, Gaius, Tychicus and Trophimus); the Hall of Tyrannus as education in the marketplace ([Acts 19:9–10](#)); and the local household churches, undoubtedly the primary place for the education of the whole people of God.

<sup>9</sup> Craig Dykstra, 'Reconceiving Practice', in Barbara Wheeler and Edward Farley (eds), *Shifting Boundaries* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), pp. 35–36. Dykstra defines a Christian practice (as distinct from activities) as inherently cooperative (not a solo action), inherently good (generates value), and inherently revelatory (bears epistemological weight). Unfortunately he then lists as Christian practices those activities which could appear obviously to be done in the name of Jesus: interpreting Scripture, worship and prayer, confession and reconciliation, service, witness, social criticism, and the mutual bearing of suffering (pp. 45, p. 48).

<sup>10</sup> While the Bible offers several models of and contexts for theological education, there are some consistent themes: (1) it is community-oriented rather than individualistic; (2) cooperative rather than competitive; (3) life-centred rather than school-based; (4) transformational rather than exclusively informational; (5) life-long rather than seasonal, packaged and concentrated; (6) available to all the people of God rather than to a clerical elite; and (7) concerned with equipping the people of God both for service in the church (the *ecclesia*) and for societal service to God (the *diaspora*).

<sup>11</sup> Extensive research and theological reflection on the congregation as the centre for spiritual and theological formation has recently taken place. Representative of this are the following: Craig Dykstra, 'Reconceiving Practice', in Barbara Wheeler and Edward Farley (eds), *Shifting Boundaries* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 1991); Edward Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); Joseph C. Hough and Barbara Wheeler (eds), *Beyond Clericalism: The Congregation as a Focus for Theological Education* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> I attribute this thought to a formative paper delivered by Dr F. W. Waters in 1962, 'Knowing God Through Thinking and Service', a presentation that started my own journey of integration.

<sup>13</sup> See Max Stackhouse's discussion of *theoria*, *praxis* and *poesis* in Max Stackhouse, *Apologia: Contextualization, Globalization, and Mission in Theological Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988). His approach does not negate the importance of straight thinking: indeed, he critiques liberation theology for its faulty *theoria* on pp. 84–105.

<sup>14</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *The Praxis of Pentecost: Revisioning the Church's Life and Mission* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1993), p. 196.

<sup>15</sup> Philip S. Keane and Melanie A. May, 'What Is the Character of Teaching, Learning, and the Scholarly Task in the Good Theological School?', *Theological Education* XXX No. 2 (Spring 1994), p. 40.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory* (New York: George Braziller, 1968), p. 101.

<sup>17</sup> The reflection that was inspired by this practice is documented in *Liberating the Laity* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1985).

<sup>18</sup> Eberhard Jüngel, *The Freedom of a Christian: Luther's Significance for Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1988), p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> William Tyndale, 'A Parable of the Wicked Mammon' (1527), in *Treatises and Portions of Holy Scripture* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1848), pp. 98, 104.

<sup>20</sup> Martin Luther, 'Treatise on Good Works', W.A. Lambert (trans.), James Atkinson (ed.), *Luther's Works* Vol. 44 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), pp. 26–27.

<sup>21</sup> Auer, *op. cit.*, p. 230 (italics mine).

<sup>22</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987/88), p. 87.

<sup>23</sup> See Stanley J. Grenz, 'Star Trek and the Next Generation: Postmodernism and the Future of Evangelical Theology Today', *Crux* XXX No. 1 (March 1994), pp. 24–32.

<sup>24</sup> Farley, 'Interpreting Situations', p. 18.

<sup>25</sup> St John Chrysostom, *On Wealth and Poverty*, trans. Catherine P. Roth (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984), p. 50.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55, emphasis mine.

<sup>28</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer in a letter from Tegel Prison 1944, quoted in Melanie Morrison, 'As One Who Stands Convicted', *Sojourners*, May 1979, p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> P. T. Forsyth, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>30</sup> *D. M. Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar, 1993–), 5. 163:28–29, quoted in Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p. 152.