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Implications of Theological Anthropology for Online Pedagogy in Graduate-Level Ministerial Training

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IMPLICATIONS OF THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY
FOR ONLINE PEDAGOGY IN GRADUATE-LEVEL
MINISTERIAL TRAINING

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Gabriel Benjamin Etzel

May 2015

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APPROVAL SHEET

IMPLICATIONS OF THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY
FOR ONLINE PEDAGOGY IN GRADUATE-LEVEL
MINISTERIAL TRAINING

Gabriel Benjamin Etzel

Read and Approved by:

Timothy Paul Jones (Chair)

John David Trentham

Date _____

To my wife, Whitney, who has continued to demonstrate patience,
love, and support throughout all of my schooling.
I would not be where I am today without you.

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PREFACE

Many people have been instrumental in the writing of this project. To my academic leadership and colleagues at Liberty University, thank you for your encouragement throughout this process. Many thanks to John Cartwright for the white board sessions, and late nights in our offices each working on our research; you are a true friend and a valued colleague. To my dissertation mentor, Dr. Timothy Paul Jones, whose genuine interest in students is refreshing, thank you for your guidance on this project. To Kayla Snow, no one has done more to shape my writing than you; thank you for taking time to listen and for your ongoing advice and insight. To Betsy Fredrick, your contribution to this work is invaluable. To my wife, Whitney, and our children, Landon, Ava, and Isaac, you have sacrificed to make this project a reality, and I cannot thank you enough.

Gabriel Etzel

Lynchburg, Virginia

May 2015

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Daniel Aleshire’s 2010 address to the members of ATS emphasized, among other things, the need for seminaries to embrace the technological advancements available to them.¹ This groundbreaking acknowledgment for many seminaries came with many questions, as the use of technology opens the door for a move away from traditional residency requirements in favor of online learning strategies, which raises questions about the legitimacy of online learning, especially in the areas of graduate-level ministerial training.²

The spring 2013 edition of the *Christian Education Journal*, focusing on “Technological Innovation and Educational Ministry,” demonstrates the trend of Christian institutions to seriously consider online educational strategies as part of their overall educational ministries.³ The responses to online education represent a wide spectrum. At one extreme, some educators embrace online learning,⁴ while, at the other

¹At the time of the address, Aleshire served as president of the Association of Theological Schools. Daniel Aleshire, “The Future Has Arrived: Changing Theological Education in a Changed World” (paper presented at the ATS/COA Biennial Meeting, Montreal, June 2010).

²John Dart, “Seminaries Expand Online Options,” *The Christian Century*, September 12, 2013, accessed June 7, 2014, <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2013-09/seminaries-expand-online-options>; Association of Theological Schools, “Board of Commissioners Approves Fully Online Professional Degree Programs at Six Schools,” accessed July 21, 2014, <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/documents/fully-online-degree-programs.pdf>.

³Consider Estep and Maddix’s statement within the journal: “Online education, whether fully online or hybrid, is becoming a central component to academic programs in colleges, universities, and seminaries.” James R. Estep and Mark A. Maddix, “Spiritual Formation in Online Higher Education Communities: Nurturing Spirituality in Christian Higher Education Online Degree Programs,” *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (2010): 424.

⁴Thomas Esselman, “The Pedagogy of the Online Wisdom Community: Forming Church Ministers in a Digital Age,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 7, no. 3 (2004): 159–70. Estep and Maddix,

end of the spectrum, some educators remain resistant to the very idea of online learning, believing the online format of education should be avoided entirely.⁵ Best practices, educational philosophy and theory, and administrative structure are all important aspects of online curriculum, and are areas being addressed by Christian institutions desiring to start online courses and programs; yet, as James Estep notes, “Theology is *the* essential element for an education that is Christian.”⁶ Christian institutions engaging in online education need a model to assist them as they navigate the intersection of theology, pedagogy, and technology.

In an effort to ensure the theological foundation of academic programs, ATS lists as part of their standards of accreditation for M.Div. programs four learning outcomes:

1. “*Religious heritage*: The program shall provide structured opportunities to develop a comprehensive and discriminating understanding of the religious heritage.”⁷

“Spiritual Formation in Online Higher Education Communities,” 423-34; Benjamin K. Forrest and Mark A. Lamport, “Modeling Spiritual Formation from a Distance: Paul’s Formation Transactions with the Roman Christians,” *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 1 (2013): 110-24; John Gresham, “The Divine Pedagogy as a Model for Online Education,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 9, no. 1 (2006): 24-28; Stephen D. Lowe and Mary E. Lowe, “Spiritual Formation in Theological Distance Education: An Ecosystems Model,” *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 1 (2010): 85; Mark A. Maddix, “Developing Online Learning Communities,” *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 1 (2013): 139-48; Lester Ruth, “Converting My Course Converted Me: How Reinventing an On-campus Course for an Online Environment Reinvigorated My Teaching,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 9, no. 4 (2006): 236-42. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9647.2006.00289.x.

⁵For an example of a seminary without any online courses or programs, consider the following statement about the “Curriculum Distinctives” at Beeson Divinity School: “Beeson students commit to full-time study, rather than part-time or distance learning.” Beeson Divinity School, “About: Beeson Distinctives,” accessed July 21, 2014, <http://www.beesondivinity.com/distinctives>.

⁶James R. Estep, Michael Anthony, and Greg Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 299.

⁷Association of Theological Schools, “Educational and Degree Program Standards,” accessed September 26, 2014 <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/educational-and-degree-program-standards.pdf>, G-40.

2. “*Cultural context*: The program shall provide opportunities to develop a critical understanding of and creative engagement with the cultural realities and structures within which the church lives and carries out its mission.”⁸

3. “*Personal and spiritual formation*: The program shall provide opportunities through which the student may grow in personal faith, emotional maturity, moral integrity, and public witness. Ministerial preparation includes concern with the development of capacities—intellectual and affective, individual and corporate, ecclesial and public—that are requisite to a life of pastoral leadership.”⁹

4. “*Capacity for ministerial and public leadership*: The program shall provide theological reflection on and education for the practice of ministry. These activities should cultivate the capacity for leadership in both ecclesial and public contexts.”¹⁰

These four outcomes set the standards for M.Div. curriculum, and ATS institutions must demonstrate the accomplishment of these outcomes to ensure they are faithfully offering an education to students. ATS institutions offering online courses or programs must also demonstrate the achievement of these outcomes, which has caused many to reconsider the manner in which these standards are met.

While wanting to maintain a commitment to the M.Div. standards of accreditation, Christian educators have also grown increasingly receptive to online graduate-level theological education designed to prepare persons to serve effectively in paid ministry positions.¹¹ Still, skepticism persists concerning the ability of online education to contribute to spiritual formation within the lives of students¹²—and spiritual formation stands as one of ATS’s standards for M.Div. education.¹³ This skepticism is

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Linda Harasim, “Shift Happens: Online Education as a New Paradigm in Learning,” *The Internet and Higher Education* 3, nos. 1-2 (2000): 41-61, doi:10.1016/S1096-7516(00)00032-4; Aleshire, “The Future Has Arrived”; Roger White, “Promoting Spiritual Formation in Distance Education,” *Christian Education Journal* 3, no. 2 (2006): 303.

¹²Estep and Maddix, “Spiritual Formation”; David H. Kelsey, “Spiritual Machines, Personal Bodies, and God: Theological Education and Theological Anthropology,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 5, no. 1 (2002): 2-9, doi:10.1111/1467-9647.00112.

¹³Association of Theological Schools, “Standards and Notations,” accessed December 28, 2013, <http://www.ats.edu/accrediting/standards-and-notations>.

being addressed in numerous works of research¹⁴ as online education adjusts to meet educational needs;¹⁵ however, a more foundational issue may have been overlooked. Too often decisions for online education designed to prepare persons to serve effectively in paid ministry positions are based on pragmatic considerations¹⁶ without sufficient attention to theological foundations.¹⁷ These pragmatic considerations may give preference to pedagogy, andragogy, and technology instead of Scripture and theology.¹⁸

¹⁴White, "Promoting Spiritual Formation"; Forrest and Lamport, "Modeling Spiritual Formation," 110-24; Mary E. Hess, "Pedagogy and Theology in Cyberspace: 'All That We Can't Leave Behind. . .,'" *Teaching Theology and Religion* 5, no. 1 (2002): 30-38, doi:10.1111/1467-9647.00115; Gresham, "The Divine Pedagogy," 24-28; Maddix, "Developing Online Learning Communities," 139-48; Lowe and Lowe, "Spiritual Formation in Theological Distance Education," 85; Eileen B. Lockhart, "Online Theological Pedagogy: The Influence of Dialogue on Spiritual Formation in the Online Theological Classroom" (Ed.D. thesis, Regent University, 2012); Esselman, "The Pedagogy of the Online Wisdom Community."

¹⁵John W. Kennedy, "The iSeminary Cometh: Online Education Is Jolting Seminaries with Rapid Enrollment Growth," *Christianity Today* 54, no. 4 (2010): 48; Kevin E. Lawson, ed., "Confessions of a 'Late Adopter,'" *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 1 (2013): 3-6; James T. Flynn, "Digital Discipleship: Christian Education in a Digital World," *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 1 (2013): 88-9; Richard S. Ascough, "Welcoming Design—Hosting a Hospitable Online Course," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 10, no. 3 (2007): 131-36, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9647.2007.00340.x.

¹⁶Robert W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction in Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); Shauna E. Tonkin, "The Christian Ethos and E-Learning," *Christian Scholar's Review* 33, no. 4 (2004): 557. In his essay on online education, Ascough notes the importance of "putting pedagogy before technology," yet fails to address the importance of putting theology before both pedagogy and technology: Richard S. Ascough, "Designing for Online Distance Education: Putting Pedagogy Before Technology," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 5, no. 1 (2002): 17-29, doi:10.1111/1467-9647.00114.

¹⁷See case study 4 in an article written by Russell Haitch. This section of the article speaks of the deep theological roots of online education, specifically dealing with the Trinitarian understanding of body, soul, and spirit. In addition, the article interacts with Kelsey's (2002) article and the idea of humans being "spiritual machines" or "complex organic bodies." Steve Delamarter et al., "Technology, Pedagogy, and Transformation in Theological Education: Five Case Studies," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 10, no. 2 (2007): 64, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9647.2007.00319.x; Stephen and Mary Lowe present a more holistic model for online education in their article, Lowe and Lowe, "Spiritual Formation"; the idea of community in education is linked to Scripture, including Paul's "koinonia community," which Lowe explains is not only related to physical presence. Stephen D. Lowe, "Building Community and Facilitating Formation in Seminary Distance Education," *Christian Perspectives in Education* 4, no. 1 (2010): 1-33.

¹⁸This resource is the most revealing of recent publications to almost entirely avoid speaking to the theological foundation necessary for online education. Although the book's first section is titled "Theoretical and Theological Foundations of Online Education," a theological foundation is absent from the book. The book begins with educational theories, and apart from a chapter on "Spiritual Formation" does not address theological considerations as foundational to online Christian education. Mark A. Maddix,

Whereas the theological foundation for traditional, face-to-face, Christian education has been articulated,¹⁹ there is a void in the articulation of how best practices for online Christian higher education are formed and informed by theological foundations.

Thesis

Widespread consensus has not been established on best practices for online Christian higher education, particularly when it pertains to online graduate-level ministerial training. One recent resource that aspires to be an authoritative guide to these best practices evidences deficiencies in the articulation of a theological foundation, particularly related to the practice of the integration of faith and learning and in regard to the primacy of Scripture. Three primary weaknesses that result from these deficiencies are a reduction in the role of the faculty to a facilitator of learning, a reduction in the objectives of the classroom to the transferring of information, and a reduction in the purpose of the institution to pragmatic efficiency. This study will seek to critique that resource, then to provide a biblical-theological framework for developing online pedagogy based on a thoroughly biblical perspective on human nature. By utilizing such a biblical-theological framework, best practices of online graduate-level ministerial training can be presented in such a way that the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution are focused more effectively on the formation of students as ministers of the gospel.

It will be argued that the role of the faculty member should be a model for

Mary E. Lowe, and James R. Estep, eds., *Best Practices of Online Education* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age, 2012).

¹⁹Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues*; idem, *So What Makes Our Teaching Christian?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008); idem, *God Our Teacher* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001); Frank E. Gaebelein, *The Pattern of God's Truth* (Whittier, CA: Association of Christian Schools International, 1968); Lois E. Lebar, *Education That Is Christian* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2000); George R. Knight, *Philosophy and Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 4th ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006); Arthur F. Holmes, *The Idea of a Christian College*, rev. ed (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987); Kenneth O. Gangel and Warren S. Benson, *Christian Education: Its History and Philosophy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002); Estep, Anthony, and Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education*.

students to follow, which necessitates institutions prioritize theological competencies ahead of technological and pedagogical competencies when hiring faculty, and institutions prioritize the faculty member's ongoing spiritual formation in the development and evaluation of theological, pedagogical, and technological competencies. In addition, it will be argued the objectives of the classroom should be formation-centered, which necessitates the faculty member should utilize social presence within online courses that prioritizes the formation of students over the learning of students, and the faculty member should create community with and among students, beyond social presence, that prioritizes the formation of students over the learning of students. Finally, it will be argued the purpose of the institution should focus on the ministerial effectiveness of the student, which necessitates that online graduate-level ministerial training should extend beyond the online classroom by utilizing the student's local church context for the spiritual formation and ministerial preparation of the student, and online graduate-level ministerial training should elevate the formation of the student as a minister of the gospel within the local church over the retention of the student or the knowledge gained by the student.

Research Concern

The resource, *Best Practices of Online Education: A Guide for Christian Higher Education*,²⁰ is one of the only resources seeking to provide a comprehensive approach to the integration of theology, pedagogy, and technology.²¹ However, while this resource is effective at presenting best practices of online education, this resource evidences deficiencies in the articulation of a theological foundation for online Christian pedagogy, which is evidenced in the implications of the ideas presented in the book that relate to the role of the faculty, the objectives of the online classroom, and the purpose of

²⁰Maddix, Lowe, and Estep, *Best Practices of Online Education*.

²¹Chapter 2 will demonstrate the gap in the literature base that *Best Practices of Online Education* was intended to fill.

the institution. As such, this resource will be critiqued as part of this research project. The stated purpose of the book is to provide a theologically informed foundation for online Christian education, and the editors of the text have contributed to the field of online theological training, particularly in the areas of learning communities, the integration of theology to social sciences, and the ecosystems approach to education. Additionally, the book is to be utilized as a resource for Christian institutions, including seminaries, which offer online programs or courses.

Best Practices of Online Education: Purpose

The editors explain the purpose for the project in the book’s preface:

This book addresses the challenges teachers and administrators face in offering online courses and programs in Christian higher education. The book is designed to assist Christian teachers and administrators to understand how to generate and facilitate effective learning in online education. We have titled this book *Best Practices of Online Education: A Guide for Christian Higher Education* because it combines the best research and practices in the field of online education with a theological framework for understanding online learning.²²

As evidenced in this stated purpose, the book is designed to combine the theoretical, pedagogical, and theological elements of online Christian education. The editors explain,

The book is unique because it approaches online education from a Christian perspective. This means the book is designed to facilitate discussion and dialogue among Christian educators about the challenges and opportunities of offering online classes and programs in a Christian context. The book also addresses the opportunities that Christian universities and seminaries have in offering online courses and programs. (x)

The editors note the intended uniqueness of the book, which is to approach “online education from a Christian perspective” (x). The editors conclude the preface by explaining their desired use of the book:

We hope this book provides teachers and administrators with a practical guide for developing effective online courses and programs. We believe this book provides both a theoretical and practical framework for generating and facilitating online education. (xiii)

The structure of the book is divided into three sections: “Theoretical and Theological

²²Maddix, Lowe, and Estep, *Best Practices of Online Education.*, x.

Foundations of Online Education” (1-77), “Generating and Facilitating Effective Learning in Online Education” (79-128), and “Developing and Assessing Online Courses and Programs” (129-81).

Best Practices of Online Education: Editors

Mark Maddix, James Estep, and Mary Lowe serve as editors for the resource. All three editors have experience in online theological education, as demonstrated by their current roles and responsibilities within institutions of theological training, and their works of literature on the topic of ministerial training. These individuals and their works help to establish baselines for examining the theological foundation behind online education, particularly in the areas of building online communities, the integration of theology to social sciences, and the ecosystems approach to learning.

Learning communities and divine pedagogy. Authors James Estep and Mark Maddix offer research within theological education with works related to learning communities:

Spiritual formation is one of the recognized benchmarks of higher education that is Christian. A communal commitment to spiritual formation is indeed part of the Christian higher education community’s DNA, and is in fact reflected in the criteria for accreditation in both the Association of Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) and the Association of Theological Schools (ATS).²³

Maddix and Estep explain that online environments may even prove to be more beneficial in some regards to spiritual formation, as they note online environments force students to engage within the curriculum and concepts because there “is no place to hide in an online class.”²⁴ Interacting with the research of David Kelsey and John Gresham, Maddix and Estep provide a helpful overview in their article of the various views of the

²³Estep and Maddix, “Spiritual Formation,” 423.

²⁴Ibid., 426.

ability of online education to foster spiritual formation within the lives of students. John Gresham argues from the perspective of the *divine pedagogy*, which is the “manner in which God teaches the human race.”²⁵ For example, Gresham argues that the physical presence of the instructor is not essential in all forms of pedagogy, and community can be established apart from face-to-face instruction, as personal interaction is available within the online environment through

a number of communication resources, ranging from one-to-one email, group discussion, and personal feedback to video, audio, and interactive media, by which an instructor can personally express and witness how the truth is incarnate in his or her life.²⁶

Maddix and Estep concur that spiritual formation and community is possible within the context of an online course, analyzing the ability of online learning to foster spiritual development within the lives of students:

While some may question the validity of online communities, they provide a context of untapped potential for Christian nurture wherein we may gather around the virtual table, with a common faith in Christ, and share with one another, creating a community that nurtures spiritual formation, and facilitates our growth in Christ and with one another.²⁷

From these comments, it is clear Maddix and Estep believe online education is conducive to spiritual formation within the lives of the students.

Integration of theology to social sciences. James Estep writes in the introduction to *A Theology for Christian Education*,

The guiding premise of this book is that Christian education is Christian because what we believe theologically should inform and influence not only the content of education in the church but also the overall approach to education in the church. . . . We have certain theological convictions that instruct the rudimentary elements in forming an approach to education, resulting in a distinctly *Christian* education.²⁸

²⁵Gresham, “The Divine Pedagogy,” 24.

²⁶Ibid., 27.

²⁷Estep and Maddix, “Spiritual Formation,” 433.

²⁸Estep, Anthony, and Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education*, 2.

Within *A Theology for Christian Education*, Estep explains in his chapter on “What Makes Education Christian?” that there are levels of integration between theology and the social sciences. Table 1 presents Estep’s levels of integration.²⁹

Table 1. Estep’s levels of integration

Level	Title	Description
1	Disintegration	Use of social science, theology unknown or regarded as irrelevant
2	Segregation	Use of theology, social sciences known and rejected
3	Paradoxical	Social Sciences and theology used independently
4	Synthetic	Primary and substantial use of social science, theology used sparingly and marginalized, and appendix for appearances
5	Paradigmatic	The social sciences and theology are both valued as necessary and legitimate, both are used simultaneously and interactively

Ultimately, Estep concludes, “For education to be Christian in its fullest sense, it must become an integrated field of theology and social science that understands itself to be in the service of the church.”³⁰ Estep presents a similar understanding of the value of integration in his contribution *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*. Estep’s chapter on “Developmental Theories: Foe, Friend, or Folly: The Role of Developmental Theories in Christian Formation,” presents a spectrum of integration. “Non-integration” is on either side of the spectrum, and three degrees of integration are in the center. Figure 1 displays Estep’s spectrum of integration.³¹

²⁹Ibid., 37.

³⁰Ibid., 41.

³¹James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim, eds., *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development* (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 42.

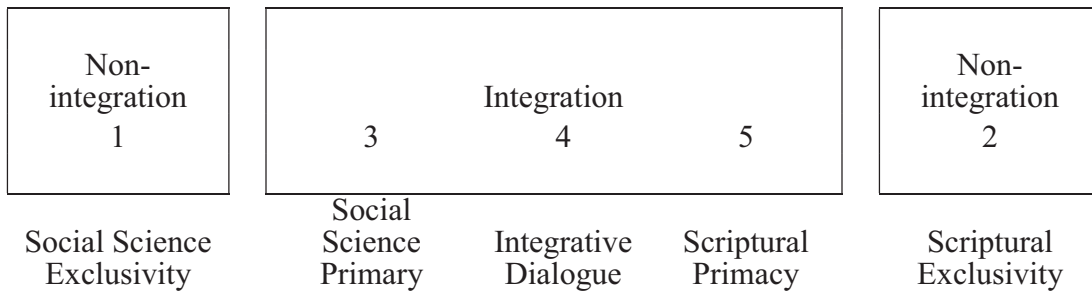


Figure 1. Estep’s spectrum of integration

Speaking to points 3, 4, and 5 on the spectrum, Estep explains the need for three integrationist approaches, which consider both the revelation from God evidenced within God’s general revelation and God’s special revelation, which he refers to as two separate “books.” As Estep explains,

Without sounding vague or intentionally simplistic, it depends on the question being posed. While endeavoring to use both books to inform our thinking, it is obvious that on some occasions, one of the two books may have more relevant information.³²

Estep’s approach acknowledges the need for a biblical perspective; however, based on particular settings or situations, the individual determines the extent to which the biblical understanding or biblical foundation is utilized. At times, priority is given to the social science theory, and not to the biblical foundation.

The ecology of learning. Stephen Lowe and Mary Lowe write on the significance of the ecology of learning:

Looking at the created order or at human beings (human ecology) from an ecosystems orientation encompasses both the part and the whole. One is not sacrificed to the other because both are important for a more complete and thorough understanding of reality.³³

They also note the importance of both individual and corporate aspects of spiritual formation (90), and the interconnectedness and reciprocity among students (93).

One particular strength of the research of Lowe and Lowe is their emphasis on

³²Ibid., 47.

³³Lowe and Lowe, “Spiritual Formation,” 88.

the larger ecosystem outside of just the theological institution, which they stress by noting the importance of social, church, and familiar aspects of one's ecosystem:

We often wrongly assume that the greatest impact on a student's faith formation while in seminary is from the seminary experience. This study and the ecosystems model we are proposing would caution us against such an unfounded assumption. The seminary experience is one part of a student's larger ecosystem. (99)

The approach offered by Lowe and Lowe acknowledges the many aspects to education that fall outside of the classroom experience. In addition, the role of the teacher, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution would all be considered as part of the larger ecosystem of the student.

Best Practices of Online Education: Foundations

Best Practices of Online Education is designed for use in the general context of Christian higher education, but also for use in a seminary setting,³⁴ and is seen as providing a "theological foundation for understanding online learning" (x). Within the book, the theological foundation is to inform the "theoretical and practical framework for generating and facilitating online education" (xiii). Essentially, the work is designed to provide the Christian educator with the best practices for online education from a Christian perspective, and the resource is one of the only books currently available which attempts to combine theology with online best practices. These best practices are at times shaped by the research of educators who give preference to social-scientific theory over the primacy of Scripture. As a consequence, important aspects of graduate-level ministerial training, such as the formation of students, can be discounted in an effort to implement these best practices.

Seven principles for good practice. Researchers Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson are among the educators who have researched and written concerning the need

³⁴Ibid., x, xi, 101.

for best practices for pedagogy. In their article “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education,” they present seven principles for effective teaching and learning at the undergraduate level. These principles are not to be viewed as laws of education, but rather effective guidelines, which should be followed in order to foster an environment of learning.³⁵ It is important to note the intention of Chickering and Gamson is not to provide a theological foundation for education; rather, the purpose of their good practices is built solely on pedagogical and pragmatic foundations.

The first principle is that there must be faculty-student contact, which is vital to the educational environment to help ensure student motivation (1). The second principle is that there must be cooperation among the students throughout the learning process because teamwork and sharing ideas with one another is an effective way to deepen a student’s understanding of coursework. The third principle is active learning, which means students are doing more than just sitting and listening to lectures. Active learning involves students talking about what they are reading, hearing, and working on, and active learning also helps to ensure that students internalize the material they are studying (1).

The fourth principle is prompt feedback on the part of the teacher. It is imperative that students receive feedback in a timely manner, because that information will be fresh in their memory, which will help them reflect on what they know, and help them recognize what they do not know, which should provide additional motivation to learn. The fifth area emphasizes that students must put in the time to do the work, as there is no substitute for time in the material (1).

The sixth principle relates to a teacher establishing high expectations for the students. It is important for teachers to require a lot from their students because students generally have a desire to accomplish the goals set before them. Finally, the seventh

³⁵Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson, “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education,” *The Wingspread Journal* 9, no. 2 (1987): 2.

principle is that students bring a variety of learning styles and talents to the classroom because students learn through a variety of ways, and an educational experience should be conducive to multiple learning styles (1).

Chickering and Gamson's work also stresses the importance of the role of teachers. They stress that educators should take seriously their task to be intentional about the education of students as there is a great deal of responsibility placed on teachers, yet a great deal of intentionality and responsibility is what is required. A teacher can have tremendous impact over the learning environment and it is the teacher's responsibility to do what he can to make sure the environment follows the seven principles outlined in the article (4).

As previously noted, the principles set forth by Chickering and Gamson were not originally intended for theological training. Chickering and Gamson provide practical guidelines for learning, yet, both the starting point and the end goal of the "seven principles" differ from the starting point and end goal of graduate-level ministerial training. This is not to indicate that the seven principles could not effectively be implemented within graduate-level ministerial training, but rather, any implementation of the principles by a Christian institution should be for the purpose of the formation of students. For instance, the first principle indicates the need for faculty-student contact for the purpose of ensuring student motivation. From the perspective of graduate-level ministerial training, faculty-student contact is important, but that importance extends beyond student motivation to student formation. Graduate-level ministerial training must take into account *why* the student should be motivated, not just the fact that the student should be motivated. Additionally, Chickering and Gamson's second principle notes the importance of cooperation among students to deepen the understanding of coursework. Within graduate-level ministerial training, the need for student-to-student interaction is necessary for more than just a deepening of the student's understanding of the course work. Student-to-student interaction is necessary as a recognition that humanity was created for community, and

that effectively interacting with others within an educational setting will help in the formation of students. Chickering and Gamson's principles are not necessarily at odds with Scripture; rather, they have inherent limitations due the lack of recognition of the theological nature of education. It is because of the limitations of the seven principles that a resource like the *Best Practices of Online Education* was written, which seeks to combine the theological, pedagogical, and technological aspects of online ministerial training.

In addition, although Chickering and Gamson did not originally design their good practices with online education in mind, others have sought to apply the seven principles to online education. Arthur Bangert designed a thirty-five-item assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of online teaching. He concludes that the "results from student evaluations suggest that the majority of students felt that the instructor used the constructivist-based teaching practices recommended by the Seven Principles framework to effectively teach a master's-level, Internet-based statistics course."³⁶ Bangert's work demonstrates that the good practices of Chickering and Gamson can be effectively implemented within online programs.

Tomoko Mukawa also applied Chickering and Gamson's seven principles to online education in a doctoral dissertation. The nature of the dissertation was to determine if online instruction reflected effective pedagogy. Mukawa's work reviewed other reports and reviews of online instruction in order to conduct an empirical comparison of face-to-face and online formats of education.³⁷ The results of the dissertation's analysis indicate that studies related to online effectiveness of teaching and learning reveal online learning is as effective as face-to-face instruction in the area of student achievement.

³⁶Arthur W. Bangert, "The Seven Principles of Good Practice: A Framework for Evaluating On-Line Teaching," *Internet and Higher Education* 7, no. 3 (2004): 227.

³⁷Tomoko Emilie Mukawa, "Meta-Analysis of the Effectiveness of Online Instruction in Higher Education Using Chickering and Gamson's Seven Principles for Good Practice" (Ed.D. thesis, University of San Francisco, 2006).

The works of Bangert and Mukawa are important for online graduate-level ministerial training because they help establish the applicability of best practices for online pedagogy. Additionally, the influence of Chickering and Gamson is noted within the *Best Practices of Online Education*, as part of the foundation for effective online discussion.³⁸ However, the appeal to the application of Chickering and Gamson’s principles is done apart from the recognition of the need for formation within the lives of students. As such, the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution are not necessarily focused on the formation of students; rather, the focus is on the actual implementation of the good practices. The articulation of—and rooting in—the theological basis of online ministerial training is lacking.

Chickering and Gamson also recognized the need for the evaluation of the role of the faculty and the comprehensive implementation of the good practices throughout the curriculum of the institution. Consequently, Chickering and Gamson created an inventory for use by institutions to judge the effectiveness of their faculty and curriculum:

These inventories are designed to help faculty members, departments, colleges, and universities examine individual behaviors and institutional policies and practices for their consistency with seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education.³⁹

The faculty inventory provides ten questions for each of the seven best practices, and the university inventory provides six sections. The inventories are designed to improve undergraduate education, and not to be an evaluation of individual faculty members: “The Inventories will be most helpful if they are used as a basis for diagnosis, rather than as a basis for judgment about performance, summative evaluation, or self-justification.”⁴⁰ The limitations of the inventories are noted, which is a reminder about the limitations of the

³⁸Mark Maddix, “Generating and Facilitating Effective Online Discussion,” in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 111-12.

³⁹Arthur W. Chickering, *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education: Faculty Inventory, Institutional Inventory* (Racine, WI: Johnson Foundation, 1989), 1.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 21.

good practices. Institutions could use the inventories to determine if the good practices are being followed, but could not use the inventories to determine the overall effectiveness of an institution. The recognition of these limitations should serve as a reminder to institutions that implementing the good practices themselves does not guarantee the formation of students, especially in online graduate-level ministerial training.

As influential as the writings and practices of Chickering and Gamson are to the study of best practices of education, Chickering and Gamson do not have an intended audience of online theological training. Previously noted, Chickering and Gamson's good practices are built on theoretical and pedagogical foundations, and are not intended to provide a theological foundation for good practices in education. As such, although their writings have an impact on current online best practices for theological education, this research project will not be critiquing Chickering and Gamson, or other secular theorists, as the focus of this dissertation concerns online graduate-level theological training, and the need for a biblical-theological framework to form best practices of online graduate-level ministerial training so that the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution are focused on the formation of students as ministers of the gospel.

Background

My interest in the theological foundation behind theological training can be attributed to many factors, specifically my formal educational studies in college and seminary (at both the masters and doctoral level) and through my current position working within Christian higher education. A major influence was during college when working with Clarence Bence as a teacher's assistant. Working with Bence provided me with the first opportunity to experience the logistics of teaching. In addition, an opportunity was provided to present a lecture to a freshman-level worldview class. It was Bence who mentioned to me the possibility of a career within Christian higher education. It was also during this time that a desire to serve within the field of Christian education (either within

the academy or the church) was fostered.

My work during my M.Div. studies included the role of a graduate assistant for Elmer Towns, who at the time was the Dean of the School of Religion. It was while working for Towns that a desire to pursue Christian education as a career was more fully realized. At the time of my M.Div., my desire was to work within the field of Christian education, whether within the church, or within the academy. Towns stressed the theology behind teaching, not just the philosophy behind it, and challenged his students to study the intersection between theology and the social sciences for the purpose of spiritual and church growth. The teachings and writings of Elmer Towns became the topic of my Doctor of Ministry research project, which contained a study of the connection between Towns' writings and teachings.⁴¹ Of particular interest relevant to this current research project is the influence of Towns on the integration of sociological principles with theology and church growth.

In the fall of 2011, I began taking courses at SBTS. The first semester included a class with Timothy Paul Jones, entitled "Theological Anthropology and Human Development." Through this course the foundation of theological anthropology behind social sciences was stressed and researched. It was also in this course that the doctrine of the image of God was studied in detail. This class also provided an introduction to the writings of David Powlison. My desire to study the theology behind social science in order to ensure the integration of God's Word and God's world was reinforced.

A significant part of my current responsibilities includes providing leadership to the online division for Liberty University's School of Religion. This position requires leadership for faculty hiring and continued development, online curriculum development, program assessment, and ongoing faculty evaluation. This position has caused me to

⁴¹Gabriel Benjamin Etzel, "A Chronological Presentation of the Writings of Elmer L. Towns from 1999-2005, Noting the Interrelatedness of His Teachings and Writings from 1980-2005" (D.Min. project, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005).

continually consider the biblical and theological foundations of education in general, and theological training in particular. In addition, this position has assisted in thinking through the diversity between general theological studies for students, and theological studies designed to prepare students to serve in paid ministry positions. Finally, this position has aided in processing through the unique challenges and opportunities inherent with residential and online programs of study.

A Doctor of Education student at SBTS was the first to mention to me this specific research project. The student was commencing his research in the area of online best practices, and mentioned to me that there could be a possibility of studying under the supervision of Timothy Paul Jones concerning a theological foundation for online theological education. After speaking with Jones about the possibility of writing on the topic, I began the process of researching to explore more potential gaps in the research concerning the theological foundation of online theological training.

Throughout his teachings, Timothy Paul Jones suggests a wisdom-based approach to Christian usage of developmental theories;⁴² however, this approach could also be applied to interaction with social sciences in general. He suggests three principles for consideration: “Principle of order—God created the world with order; Principle of suspicion—the order observed may be creation, or it may be fallenness; Principle of insufficient teleology—a secular theorist’s end point is not the same as a Christian’s end point.”⁴³ As a result of these principles, there may be aspects of developmental theories or social-science research that are helpful for Christians; however, some areas fall outside of the scope of secular human developmental theories or social-science’s ability to adequately explain. To illustrate this point, four aspects of humanity are considered, with

⁴²Timothy Jones, “Theological Anthropology and Human Development” (classroom lecture notes, 97000—*Theological Anthropology and Human Development*, October 25, 2011).

⁴³Ibid.

an indication of the compatibility between Christian and secular theorists:

1. Spiritual/doxological—no overlap between Christian and secular theorists
2. Socio-ethical—slight overlap between Christian and secular theorists
3. Cognitive—significant overlap between Christian and secular theorists
4. Physical—nearly complete overlap between Christian and secular theorists⁴⁴

Jones explains the higher an individual advances on this scale of humanity, the greater the need for rootedness in special revelation. Although education in general interacts with all of these four areas, theological education should be viewed as ultimately a spiritual and doxological pursuit, which necessitates a strong theological foundation for approaching the nature and process of theological education.

The original topic discussed with Jones was a proposed topic for an Ed.D. thesis. The topic was a “Comparative Analysis and Theological Critique of Predominant Models of Online Learning.” The research concern was that

nearly all educational institutions—including theological institutions—have embraced online learning in recent years. However, this choice has rarely been rooted in deep theological or even pedagogical reflection. Instead, this choice has typically been driven by pragmatic considerations. This thesis will first develop a theological model for online learning, using David Powlison’s priorities for the development of biblical counseling methodologies. The thesis will then develop a taxonomy of primary approaches to online learning in institutions that primarily prepare persons to serve in paid ministry positions. The thesis will conclude by using the theological model of online learning to analyze each primary approach to online learning.⁴⁵

The topic and research concern developed into this current research project, which still carries significant elements of the original topic and concern, such as the need for a theological foundation behind online theological training, and the use of David Powlison’s epistemological priorities as a model for research.

Methodology

This dissertation is primarily a critical-constructive project, designed to engage

⁴⁴Concepts adapted by Timothy Paul Jones from Eric L. Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care: A Christian Psychology Proposal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014).

⁴⁵Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, “2012 Ed.D. Thesis Topics” (Fall 2012).

the current discussion of the theological foundation for online graduate-level ministerial training—specifically noting the need to commence research and practice of online theological education with an established theological anthropology. The primary critique of this project is conducted within chapter 4 of this dissertation, and although the editors of the resource being critiqued do not put forth a specific unified model for online theological education, the best practices of the resource provide implications for online theological training. As such, the implications of the best practices for online graduate-level ministerial training will be critiqued. This dissertation is secondarily constructive in that it will include a proposed biblical-theological framework for best practices of online graduate-level ministerial training, which can be implemented so that the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution are focused on the formation of students as ministers of the gospel.

David Powlison’s three epistemological priorities will be utilized as a model to examine existing foundations for online theological education, and for constructing more faithful foundations for the future. Powlison writes primarily in the field of counseling, yet his principles have been applied to another social-scientific theory.⁴⁶ These priorities provide a starting place of Scripture for his pursuit of the assimilation of both Scripture and social science.⁴⁷ Powlison writes, “Scripture is sufficient, not in that it is exhaustive, containing all knowledge, but in that it rightly aligns a coherent and comprehensive system of counseling that is radically at odds with every a-theistic model.”⁴⁸ In order to stress the importance of Scripture when engaging social-scientific research, Powlison

⁴⁶Brenna Mae Whitley, “Applying a Comprehensive-Internal Model for the Evaluation of Social-Scientific Research to the Identify Crisis Stage of Erik Erikson’s Developmental Theory” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009).

⁴⁷David Powlison, “Questions at the Crossroads: The Care of Souls and the Modern Psychotherapies,” in *Care for the Soul*, ed. Mark R. McMinn and Timothy R. Phillips (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001).

⁴⁸Ibid., 32-33.

presents three priorities as an epistemological model: “The first priority: articulating biblical truth and developing a systematic theology of care for the soul. The second priority: exposing, debunking and reinterpreting alternative models. The third priority: learning what we can from defective models.”⁴⁹ As can be seen from Powlison’s model, he ensures that Scripture has a place of primacy when interacting with social-scientific research.

Limitations of Study

In order to utilize a biblical-theological framework for the establishment of best practices of online graduate-level ministerial training concerning the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution, this project will employ limitations concerning the theological, pedagogical, and technological aspects of the research. Theologically, the research will be limited to a study of the doctrine of the image of God. Pedagogically, the research will be limited to M.Div. degree programs. Technologically, the research will be limited to the online format.

Biblical View of Human Nature

Many theological motifs could be traced throughout the pages of Scripture to provide an educator with a foundation from which to build a model for education. For instance, the glory of God, education as worship, and Jesus as educator are all themes that could be traced throughout the Bible, which speak to the need for, and purposes of, education. However, in the following study, the motif of the image of God will be explored, as this doctrine is central to understanding theological anthropology.⁵⁰

Theological anthropology, and more specifically the doctrine of the image of

⁴⁹Ibid., 34-35.

⁵⁰Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 657.

God, will be utilized within this research study for two primary reasons. First, as James K. A. Smith notes, behind every pedagogy is a view of philosophical anthropology.⁵¹ One's view of mankind affects the way in which the individual seeks to educate others, and also affects the way one views their own learning, since education is both about the subject matter (curriculum) and about the subject (the student).⁵² For instance, Smith writes that educational theories based on an understanding that mankind is at the core a thinking being will focus the educational system on the dissemination of information.⁵³ Educational theories that believe mankind is a desiring being will focus on forming the desires of the individual.⁵⁴ Secondly, one's understanding of the doctrine of the image of God is central to one's understanding of theological anthropology, and consequently will be the focus of this research.⁵⁵ All other doctrines within theological anthropology (e.g. constitutional nature of man) flow out of one's understanding of the doctrine of the image of God.

M.Div. Programs

The pedagogical focus of this work will be limited to online graduate-level ministerial training specific to the M.Div. degree. As explained by the ATS, the purpose of the M.Div. degree is “to prepare persons for ordained ministry and for general pastoral and religious leadership responsibilities in congregations and other settings.”⁵⁶ The 2013-

⁵¹James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 27, 45.

⁵²In response to the question, “what do teachers teach,” Neil Postman states, “Teachers teach subjects.” Neil Postman, “Grammar and the Education Controversy,” *English Journal* 49, no. 7 (1960): 489.

⁵³Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 28.

⁵⁴The premise behind Smith's work is that humans are at the core desiring beings, which will be explored in detail in chap. 2 of this research. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*.

⁵⁵Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 657.

⁵⁶Association of Theological Schools, “Educational and Degree Program Standards,” G-39.

2014 ATS Annual Data Tables indicate that across all of the member schools the M.Div. degree programs enrolled 31,381 of the total head count enrollment in all programs of 71,005,⁵⁷ which means M.Div. enrollment represented 44 percent of the total enrollment within ATS member schools. The M.Div. degree is the standard degree for pastoral ministry, as the degree is designed to train for full-time ministry. The graduate-level training of persons for ministry is the focus of this dissertation; as such, the M.Div. degree is the natural focus.

Online Degree Programs

Online education is growing in popularity and influence.⁵⁸ Recent changes to the regulations of ATS have made it possible for seminaries to be granted an exception to offer fully online Master of Divinity programs.⁵⁹ As such, the focus of this research will be limited to the online format of education, as it is anticipated that online theological education will continue to expand in the future.

Definition of Terms

The following section provides an overview of terms and concepts that will be used throughout this research project.

ATS. The Association of Theological School consists of “more than 270 graduate schools of theology in the United States and Canada . . . [with the mission] to promote the improvement and enhancement of theological schools to the benefit of

⁵⁷Association of Theological Schools, “2013-2014 Annual Data Tables,” accessed July 2, 2014, <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/institutional-data/annual-data-tables/2013-2014-annual-data-tables.pdf>, 30.

⁵⁸The Sloan Consortium, “Changing Course: Ten Years of Tracking Online Education in the United States,” accessed June 6, 2014, http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/changing_course_2012.

⁵⁹Dart, “Seminaries Expand Online Options.”

communities of faith and the broader public.”⁶⁰ ATS explains,

Member schools conduct post-baccalaureate professional and academic degree programs to educate persons for the practice of ministry and for teaching and research in the theological disciplines. These schools differ from one another in deep and significant ways, but through their membership in ATS, they demonstrate a commitment to shared values about what constitutes good theological education. Collectively, ATS member schools enroll approximately 74,500 students and employ more than 7,200 faculty and administrators.⁶¹

Christian education. The definition for *Christian education* used for this dissertation is derived from *A Theology for Christian Education*:

In its most basic form, education can be understood as the intentional process of facilitating preferred learning. As such, education is a systematic approach to intentional learning that combines the activity of educating students, the process of students becoming educated, and the educational result of this approach.⁶²

Image of God. Throughout this work, the *image of God* will be discussed in further detail; however, in general, when the term is used within this work, it will mean what Wayne Grudem explains as “the fact that man is in the image of God means that man is like God and represents God.”⁶³ This concept, and the implications of this doctrine will be further explained and elaborated upon throughout this research project.

M.Div. As described by ATS, the *Master of Divinity* degree requires a minimum of three academic years of full-time work or its equivalent . . . and is a postbaccalaureate degree. Admission requirements shall include (1) a baccalaureate degree from an institution of higher education accredited by a US agency recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, or approved by a Canadian provincial quality assurance agency, or the demonstrated educational equivalent of an accredited or approved North American baccalaureate degree; (2) evidence of the commitment and qualities desired for pastoral leadership; and (3) the academic ability to engage in graduate education.⁶⁴

Ministerial training. The concept of *ministerial training* will be used to mean a

⁶⁰Association of Theological Schools, “About ATS,” accessed June 2, 2014, <http://www.ats.edu/about/overview>.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Estep, Anthony, and Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education*, 16.

⁶³Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 442.

⁶⁴Association of Theological Schools, “Educational and Degree Program Standards,” G-42-43.

M.Div. program. Although other ministerial training programs are available at the bachelor, master, or doctoral levels, the M.Div. degree is the standard ministerial training degree program, and will therefore be utilized throughout this research project.

Distance education. SACS defines *distance education* well:

For the purposes of the Commission on College's accreditation review, distance education is a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. A distance education course may use the internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communications devices; audio conferencing; or video cassettes, DVD's, and CD-ROMs if used as part of the distance learning course or program.⁶⁵

Online education. This term is positioned within the broader category of distance education, and within online education the instructor and student are separated for the entirety of the course, and the majority of instruction utilizes the Internet.

Theological anthropology. Although it is acknowledged that the term *theological anthropology* includes the broad study of the body, soul, and spirit, throughout this research, the concept of theological anthropology will be limited to the doctrine of the image of God, which is the central doctrine related to theological anthropology.⁶⁶

Spiritual formation. Benjamin Forrest and Mark Lamport describe the concept of *spiritual formation* in their article, "Modeling Spiritual Formation from a Distance: Paul's Formation Transactions with the Roman Christians":

Spiritual formation, we contend, is the process of coming to grips with our finite humanness and developing an understanding that our sufficiency lies in the person of Christ. This definition represents the 'transformed mind' that Paul describes in Romans 12. The result of this type of transformation is an understanding that our position and sufficiency are wholly and completely dependent upon Christ and what he has completed for us in his death and resurrection.⁶⁷

⁶⁵Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, "SACS Guidelines for Addressing Distance and Correspondence Education," accessed September 12, 2014, <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/081705/Guidelines%20for%20Addressing%20Distance%20and%20Correspondence%20Education.pdf>.

⁶⁶Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 657.

⁶⁷Forrest and Lamport, "Modeling Spiritual Formation," 111.

CHAPTER 2

THE THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY BEHIND ONLINE PEDAGOGY

This chapter is an explanation of the importance of considering how theological anthropology affects pedagogy. A brief history of online graduate-level ministerial training is presented, followed by a detailed presentation arguing that behind every pedagogy is a view of theological anthropology. This presentation commences with the work of James K. A. Smith in *Desiring the Kingdom*.¹ Next, an overview of literature specific to the intersection of theology, pedagogy, and technology is presented, noting the themes within the literature base that stress the importance of both recognizing and utilizing the medium of online education, and the necessity of spiritual formation. Finally, the chapter concludes with a presentation of David Powlison's comprehensive-internal model for coordination of theological truth with knowledge gained through the social sciences,² which is presented as a biblical-theological framework for online graduate-level ministerial training.

Online Ministerial Training: Background

The advent of online seminary education in the latter part of the twentieth century has dramatically affected the face of online theological education.³ The

¹James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).

²David Powlison, "Questions at the Crossroads: The Care of Souls and the Modern Psychotherapies," in *Care for the Soul*, ed. Mark McGinn and Timothy Phillips (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001).

³The Association of Theological Schools, "Board of Commissioners Approves Fully Online Professional Degree Programs at Six Schools," accessed June 6, 2014, <http://www.ats.edu/search/gss/>

Association of Theological Schools “did not permit any kind of distance education” until 2000; yet, to date, at least six ATS schools have received an exception to offer “fully online degree programs,” and 38 percent of ATS schools “offer at least six courses online.”⁴ The influence of technological advances date as far back as the invention of the telegraph in 1861,⁵ and these advances require educators to shift models of education.⁶ Current uses of technology open the door for a move away from residency requirements in favor of online learning strategies; online education is no longer on the peripheral of education.⁷ Daniel Aleshire explains the paradigmatic shift in education and indicates “more than technology has changed,”⁸ as seminaries are experiencing a paradigm shift in the way graduate-level ministerial training is accomplished.

This shift is seen in examples like the Spring 2013 edition of the *Christian Education Journal* entitled, “Technological Innovation and Educational Ministry,” which demonstrates the trend of Christian institutions to seriously consider online educational strategies as part of their overall educational mission.⁹ On a broad scale, a survey completed in January of 2013 found over 6.7 million students were enrolled in online

online.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Linda Harasim, “Shift Happens: Online Education as a New Paradigm in Learning,” *The Internet and Higher Education* 3, nos. 1-2 (2000): 43, doi:10.1016/S1096-7516(00)00032-4.

⁶Ibid., 42.

⁷Ibid., 59.

⁸Daniel Aleshire, “The Future Has Arrived: Changing Theological Education in a Changed World” (paper presented at the ATS/COA Biennial Meeting, Montreal, June 2010), 1.

⁹Consider Estep and Maddix’ statement within the journal: “Online education, whether fully online or hybrid, is becoming a central component to academic programs in colleges, universities, and seminaries.” James R. Estep and Mark A. Maddix, “Spiritual Formation in Online Higher Education Communities: Nurturing Spirituality in Christian Higher Education Online Degree Programs,” *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (2010): 424.

courses in 2011,¹⁰ and 86 percent of institutions offered online courses in 2012.¹¹ Specific to ATS, in the 2011-2012 academic year “nearly 20,000 of the approximately 74,000 students enrolled in ATS member schools completed at least one course by distance education.”¹² In addition, ATS recently “set guidelines for exceptions to the residency requirement,”¹³ allowing select schools to offer fully online M.Div. degrees. However, although online education continues to increase, widespread consensus has not been established on best practices for online graduate-level ministerial training. As such, seminaries desiring to integrate online education with a theological foundation are left with a gap in the literature base on the effective use of best practices for online pedagogy from a theological perspective. Resources seeking to fill this gap evidence deficiency in the articulation of the theological foundation as related to the primacy of Scripture, or the pedagogical foundation as related to the best practices of online learning. A biblical-theological framework for developing online pedagogy based on a thoroughly biblical perspective on human nature is needed. By utilizing such a biblical-theological framework, best practices of online graduate-level ministerial training can be presented in such a way that various aspects of online graduate-level ministerial training are focused more effectively on the formation of students as ministers of the gospel.

Theological Anthropology and Pedagogy

Concerning the intersection of theology, pedagogy, and technology, it is

¹⁰Sloan Consortium, “Changing Course: Ten Years of Tracking Online Education in the United States,” 17, accessed June 6, 2014, http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/changing_course_2012.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 20.

¹²The Association of Theological Schools, “Board of Commissioners.”

¹³John Dart, “Seminaries Expand Online Options,” *The Christian Century*, September 12, 2013, accessed June 7, 2014, <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2013-09/seminaries-expand-online-options>.

important to consider how one's view of theological anthropology influences one's view of pedagogy because education is both about the subject matter (curriculum) and about the subject (the student).¹⁴ As such, this section argues that behind every pedagogy is a view of theological anthropology, which is a summary of the thesis and argument for James K. A. Smith's work, *Desiring the Kingdom*. Smith explains that the way mankind is viewed will affect the way in which individuals seek to educate one another. Educational theories based on an understanding that mankind is at the core a thinking being will focus the educational system on the dissemination of information.¹⁵ Educational theories that believe mankind is a desiring being will focus on forming the desires of the individual.¹⁶

Summary of Thesis and Argument

In his book *Desiring the Kingdom*, Smith presents what he calls "pedagogy of desire" (25). Arguing that behind every pedagogy is an individual's view of philosophical anthropology (27, 45), Smith critiques models of theological anthropology that present mankind as being either a thinking being or a believing being, as being reductionistic (46). Instead, Smith argues that mankind is at the core a desiring being, or a loving being (25, 32, 51, 131): "To be human is to love, and it is what we love that defines who we are . . . our ultimate love is what we worship" (51). One's ultimate desire, or worship, will become the ultimate driving force within the life of that individual.

Smith challenges the mindset that education is primarily concerned with *information*, and instead favors a mindset of education primarily concerned with the *formation* of the individual (19, 24, 26). As such, education is not something that only

¹⁴In response to the question "What do teachers teach?" Neil Postman states, "Teachers teach subjects." Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 27, 45.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁶The premise behind Smith's work is that at the core humans are desiring beings, which will be explored in detail in chap. 2 of this research. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*.

happens in the vicinity of the classroom; rather, education as formation is happening everywhere (19, 94). Consequently, attention should be directed not just on *what* is taught, but also on *how* something is taught (32).

Smith's proposed model of "The Human as Desiring Animal" (48) starts with the recognition that humans are at their core loving beings (51). Secondly, Smith's model considers the target of an individual's love, or loves *telos*. As he indicates, what an individual or community loves is what defines and distinguishes that individual or community (52). Using a picture of the good life as an example, Smith explains that individuals have a picture of an ultimate desire (an affection), prior to having a cognitive idea of the good life (53): "Rather than being pushed by beliefs, we are pulled by a *telos* that we desire" (54). Smith further explains all of humanity longs for the kingdom, but not all of humanity longs for the same kingdom (54).

Smith's model incorporates a third aspect because of the varying longings, which addresses the aspect of how an individual's desires are aimed at a particular *telos*. Smith argues that one's view of the kingdom—one's longings and desires—is directed by one's dispositions (or habits) (55). Distinguishing these habits from biological instincts, Smith understands these habits to be made (or formed) within the life of the individual, to the point where the habits become second nature (56-57). These habits are formed by one's practices, or routines (59). This model of the human as desiring animal has implications for educational institutions because such institutions help mold and shape the individual's and community's routines. Academic institutions help direct the aim of the individual's desires, which necessitates attention beyond what ideas or beliefs are being taught at an institution, to attention to the *telos* of the student's love (73).

Smith asks the question throughout the book, "What does it really mean to be human?" (94) He concludes that Christian worship is training for being human (187, 205), because when properly conducted, Christian worship teaches the individual what to love (216). Smith also interacts with mankind's creation in the image of God by noting

several aspects of this creation, calling the image of God “a task, a mission” (163). He notes the image of God indicates a royal office or calling, which places humanity as a vice-regent with God (163). In addition, he indicates the image of God points to the significance of an individual’s relationship with God (168), and with others (202).

Smith ends his book with a vision of what a Christian university would look like if his ideas were implemented into a university (215). It is in this final chapter of the book that Smith explains what he refers to as “three monastic opportunities” for Christian universities. The first opportunity is what he calls “reconnecting church, chapel, and classroom” through “en-formed learning” (223). This opportunity includes an emphasis and intentionality within the chapel service at a university. The second opportunity is “reconnecting classroom, dorm room, and neighborhood” through “environments of learning” (225). Through this opportunity, students and faculty are able to connect outside the classroom. Smith’s third opportunity is “reconnecting body and mind” through “embodied learning” (228). By “embodied learning,” Smith means the necessity of students to be active participants in their learning by intentional practices relevant to their learning: “[Education] will also seek ways to extend and improvise upon Christian practices in order to create a learning environment that is animated by intentional practices that form the imagination and shape character” (228).

Smith’s work has many implications for online graduate-level ministerial training. Most significant is the recognition that one’s view of theological anthropology shapes and determines one’s pedagogical practices. A thorough assessment of one’s understanding of human nature is essential when seeking to educate others, especially in the context of online graduate-level ministerial training where faculty and students are not physically present together. In addition, Smith stresses the importance of education as formation, and not just the transmission of information. This emphasis on formation is also stressed in ATS standards (specifically as it relates to spiritual formation) as a

recognized aspect of ministerial training.¹⁷ Additionally, based on Smith's understanding of humanity as a desiring being, it is necessary to consider how pedagogy influences a student's desires, or as Smith indicates, what one loves or what one worships. Smith recognizes this influence as being more than just within the classroom, as the liturgies (habits) inherent within pedagogy shape a student's desire, and consequently, shape the student's spiritual formation.¹⁸ Subsequently, Smith's work demonstrates that the very approach to education (the framework which educators work from) is important for online graduate-level ministerial training.¹⁹ Smith's statement that educational institutions should "also seek ways to extend and improvise upon Christian practices in order to create a learning environment that is animated by intentional practices that form the imagination and shape character"²⁰ is important for online graduate-level ministerial training. Although the faculty and student are separated during the educational process, the student's immediate ministerial context offers opportunities for these practices to be developed.

Centrality of Theological Anthropology in Foundations for Christian Education

Smith's work argues for the need for educators to consider one's view of theological anthropology and the corresponding approach to pedagogy, which help to shape the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution. Where there are deficiencies in the articulation of a theological foundation,

¹⁷Association of Theological Schools, "Educational and Degree Program Standards," G-40, accessed September 26, 2014, <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/educational-and-degree-program-standards.pdf>.

¹⁸Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 55.

¹⁹Although Smith applies his model of pedagogy to traditional, residential degree programs, the implications for online graduate-level ministerial training can be seen in the aspects that indicate an academic institution can help shape and mold an individual's or a community's desires. *Ibid.*, 73.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 228.

the philosophy of education will be affected, which can lead to the reduction in the role of the faculty to a facilitator of learning, a reduction in the objectives of the classroom to the transferring of information, and a reduction in the purpose of the institution to pragmatic efficiency. As such, the following section considers the centrality of theological anthropology in foundations for Christian education. By grounding these foundational aspects of pedagogy within a robust view of theological anthropology, best practices of online graduate-level ministerial training can be presented in such a way that the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution are focused more effectively on the formation of students as ministers of the gospel.

Theological Anthropology and the Primacy of Scripture

Author and educator Robert Pazmiño considers the foundations of Christian education in the following areas: biblical, theological, philosophical, historical, sociological, psychological, and curricular. Pazmiño acknowledges that Christians must also incorporate understanding from outside of Scripture; however, the primacy of Scripture is acknowledged when he cautions, “Such incorporation . . . is subject to the continuing authority of God’s Word as found in Scripture.”²¹ It is the foundation of the Word of God that the author argues is needed in order for Christian educators to engage in the culture.²² The order of investigation is also important to Pazmiño: “By exploring biblical and theological foundations first, Christ educators can affirm transcultural universals that may then guide all educational conceptions and efforts.”²³ The need for, and primacy of, Scripture in the process of integration of faith and learning is essential to

²¹Robert W Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction in Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 10.

²²Ibid., 19.

²³Ibid., 10-11.

the foundations of Christian education.

Noting the theological foundation of education, Pazmiño identifies four distinct elements of theology that constitute a Christian approach to education: “biblical authority, the necessity of conversion, the redemptive work of Christ, and personal piety.”²⁴ The aspect of the image of God is important²⁵ and is addressed in connection to what Pazmiño calls a “Reforming View of Education.”²⁶ The image of God is also seen in connection to metaphysical understandings of education related to the foundations of anthropology,²⁷ and psychology.²⁸ In addition, in his “Interactive Christian Model,” Pazmiño notes, “By nature of their created nature, persons have intrinsic dignity and are worthy of respect, love, and service in all areas of their lives.”²⁹ The theological foundation of the image of God extends to all areas of the individual’s life, and is an essential recognition for foundational aspects of education.

Reflecting on the importance of the doctrine of the image of God, Pazmiño relates the doctrine to an individual’s identity and relationship to the Trinity:

Persons are created in the very image of God (Gen. 1:27) and as God’s creatures are accountable to fulfill God’s purposes for all of creation. Persons find their primary identity as children of God and potentially friends and followers of Jesus Christ and vessels of the Holy Spirit in the world.³⁰

This recognition of an individual’s identity as related to an understanding of the image of

²⁴Ibid., 57-58.

²⁵In *Foundational Issues*, the doctrine of the image of God is noted and acknowledged as an essential foundation to Christian education. However, although the doctrine of the image of God is mentioned throughout the book, as is demonstrated in the overview provided, the doctrine is not stressed as the central concern of the theological educator.

²⁶Ibid., 72-73.

²⁷Ibid., 94.

²⁸Ibid., 198, 222, 224, 228.

²⁹Ibid., 224.

³⁰Robert W. Pazmiño, “Teaching in the Name of Jesus,” *Christian Education Journal* 5, no. 1 (2008): 173.

God is essential to understanding the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the university as the institution focuses on the formation of students as ministers of the gospel.

Theological Anthropology and Formation

The formation of students is a distinguishing aspect of Christian education.

Reflecting on the teachings of Jesus, Pazmiño notes the importance of the formation of students as he provides a summary of the theological foundations for teaching:

First, in relation to teaching in the name of Jesus, the incarnation looms prominent in affirming a sense of identity for Christian teachers. One's Christian identity centers in one's adoption as a child of God and one's calling as a follower of Jesus. Second, in relation to teaching in the spirit of Jesus, the crucifixion emerges in inviting compassion that embraces both suffering and service as a commitment for Christian teachers. Third, in relation to teaching in the power of Jesus, the resurrection provides a model for guiding how Christian teachers consider the possibility of reformation, which invites transformation in their ministries and in the lives of their students and their wider communities.³¹

As evidence of this need for formation within teaching, Pazmiño contrasts Jesus' teaching to Nicodemus with Jesus' teaching to the Samaritan woman, and notes the importance of teaching for transformation. This transformation of the teacher and the student is into the image of Christ.

Considering the role of the teacher, Pazmiño emphasizes what he calls "mutually directed" teaching, which means both students and teachers are dependent upon one another in the teaching and learning process.³² This view of teaching is more of a pilgrimage, which necessitates a relationship between the teacher and the student:

The teacher is the experienced guide and companion who cares for and stimulates those with whom she or he is traveling. Teaching is viewed as a cooperative endeavor that employs both artistic and scientific elements in such a way that

³¹Robert W. Pazmiño, *So What Makes Our Teaching Christian?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 1.

³²Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues*, 238.

creativity from the realm of art and validity from the realm of science are both preserved.³³

The role of the teacher within the formation of students is a vital relationship within the educational process, which necessitates faculty who reflect the teachings and ministry of Christ within their own lives and teachings.

Also important to the formation of students is the formation of faculty. Considering the role of faculty, Pazmiño explores the foundations of Christian education by utilizing the theological categories to explore the “relationship between God and us.”³⁴ The goal of this exploration is to “provide the terms to wrestle with the implications our communion with God has for the relational ministry of Christian education” (10). Within this discussion, the doctrine of the image of God is addressed in relationship to the Trinity (30). The doctrine of the Trinity is emphasized as informing and forming the teaching ministry of Christian educators. Pazmiño suggests a Trinitarian approach to education that “defines education as the process of sharing content with persons in the context of their community and society” (30). He also provides a “five-task model” (146-47), which includes the tasks of proclamation, community formation, service, advocacy, and worship (147). This acknowledgement of what an individual worships once again recognizes the importance of the role of formation within the life of the student.

Recognizing Theological Anthropology as Foundation for Pedagogy

It is important for seminaries to recognize the centrality of theological anthropology for foundations of Christian education. The purpose of the institution, the objectives of the classroom, and the role of the teacher, are all areas affected by an institution’s recognition of the centrality of theological anthropology for the foundations of Christian education. Recognizing the centrality of theological anthropology as a

³³Ibid., 242.

³⁴Robert W. Pazmiño, *God Our Teacher* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 10.

foundation for Christian education and recognizing the need for the formation of students into the image of God will provide a framework for pedagogy within graduate-level ministerial training at seminaries. This biblical-theological framework assists in the incorporation of best practices of online graduate-level ministerial training so that these best practices can be presented in such a way that the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution are focused more effectively on the formation of students as ministers of the gospel.

Theological Anthropology and Online Education

Having examined the summary and argument of James K. A. Smith, that behind every pedagogy is a view of anthropology, and having considered how a view of theological anthropology influences the foundations of pedagogy, it is important to overview how theological anthropology has been considered in light of online pedagogy. The emphasis in this overview is to provide a sampling of the literature available, and to recognize the need for more work to be done concerning the intersection of theology, pedagogy, and technology. It will be demonstrated that within the literature there is recognition of the medium of online learning, techniques for the utilization of the medium of online learning, and also the recognition of the need for spiritual formation among online Christian programs. In addition, it will be demonstrated that there is more work to be done to combine the areas of research related to the intersection of theology, pedagogy, and technology.

Recognizing the Medium of Online Learning

There are many mediums of communication available for educators in both residential and online learning formats, and the effectiveness of one's education will be determined, at least in part, by both the teacher's and the student's ability to effectively communicate through these various mediums. Speaking to the importance of medium, Marshal McLuhan explains,

In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology.³⁵

Jill Schiefelbein affirms, “We do not always need a rich medium to accomplish a communication goal. A common predictor of media performance is one’s ability to select the proper medium for the task at hand.”³⁶ Similarly, Kristen Betts notes,

Interaction in face-to-face, online, and blended programs vary depending upon the channels of communication integrated into the courses. . . . Recognizing there are inherent differences between traditional and online environments, administrators and faculty must understand the importance of integrating effective communication strategies into online program development, course design, and instruction to engage, connect, and retain students.³⁷

The task of educators is to strategically select the proper medium through which education can be effectively delivered.

Noting the difference between residential and online courses, Betts comments, “Even when words are not being used, communication is still taking place in a face-to-face classroom. However, in an online classroom, there is a shift and increased emphasis on words, particularly with written communication.”³⁸ John Bassili concludes in his study of students attending either in-person lectures, or watching recorded lectures, that there is “no difference in learning outcomes linked to media”³⁹ between students attending a lecture face-to-face, and a student watching the same lecture through video. Yet, Bassili

³⁵Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 7.

³⁶Jill Schiefelbein, “Media Richness and Communication in Online Education,” *Faculty Focus*, April 10, 2012, accessed November 16, 2014, <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/media-richness-and-communication-in-online-education/>.

³⁷Kristen Betts, “Lost in Translation: Importance of Effective Communication in Online Education,” *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration* 12, no. 2 (2009): 1

³⁸*Ibid.*, 10-11.

³⁹John N. Bassili, “Media Richness and Social Norms in the Choice to Attend Lectures or to Watch Them Online,” *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia* 17, no. 4 (2008): 471.

also readily recognizes that the content and structure of the course could be a factor. The study Bassili conducted was with

a large introductory course, and given that lectures in such courses tend to involve one-sided communication from the instructor to students, it is not surprising that information richness played a much more important role in media choice than interpersonal richness.⁴⁰

It is important to recognize the goal of a particular communication medium when engaging students in either an online or a residential format.

Rey Hernández-Julián and Christina Peters also provide evidence that there is no significant difference between online and paper coursework. Their study consisted of two groups of Principles of Microeconomics students, one with electronic assignments and readings, and the other group with paper assignments and readings. Although the study found students who submitted their assignments online were more likely to complete the assignments, the overall grades for the course were not significantly different between the two groups.⁴¹ These studies all point to consideration of media richness and the medium of education.

Media Richness Theory is a consideration when exploring the significance of online or residential teaching. According to Media Richness Theory, the medium chosen should correspond to the uncertainty, or the equivocality, associated within the information being communicated.⁴² However, studies by Avner Caspi and Paul Gorsky concluded that “the present results failed to support this argument—there was no preference for richer media over leaner media for different types of message

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Rey Hernández-Julián and Christina Peters, “Targeting Teaching: Does the Medium Matter? Online versus Paper Coursework,” *Southern Economic Journal* 78, no. 4 (2012): 1333-45, doi:10.4284/0038-4038-78.4.1333.

⁴²Richard L. Daft and Robert H. Lengel, “Organizational Information Requirements, Media Richness and Structural Design,” *Management Science* 32, no. 5 (1986): 554-71, doi:10.2307/2631846.

equivocality.”⁴³ Morgan Shepherd and Benjamin Martz also evaluated the effectiveness of online education related to Media Richness Theory. Shepherd and Martz analyzed the media richness within various course management platforms, and concluded that the

more media used effectively in a distance program, the greater the satisfaction with that program. The effective usage of the technology (i.e. tools such as discussion forums, document sharing areas, and web casting) significantly enhances the communication and ultimately, the satisfaction with a program.⁴⁴

The importance of choosing the right medium, and the right techniques within that medium, are important considerations for online educators.

Neil Postman wrote much about the effects of technology (specifically television) and new media on a society. Explaining the difference between a print culture and a media culture, Postman underscores the significance to children: “All of the secrets that a print culture kept from children—about sex, violence, death and human aberration—are revealed all at once by media which do not, and cannot, exclude any audience.”⁴⁵ Once created, videos and online posts are permanent fixtures within a digital society. Postman was also known for using questions as a means for evaluating the value of education in general, and more specifically of technology. Summarizing his questions, he would ask, “What is the problem to which this new technology is the answer?”⁴⁶ or “What is the tradeoff for utilizing a technology?”⁴⁷ The recognition of this tradeoff

⁴³Avner Caspi and Paul Gorsky, “Instructional Media Choice: Factors Affecting the Preferences of Distance Education Coordinators,” *Journal of Educational Multimedia and Hypermedia* 14, no. 2 (2005): 187.

⁴⁴M. M. Shepherd and W. B. Martz, “Media Richness Theory and the Distance Education Environment,” *Journal of Computer Information Systems* 47, no. 1 (2006): 119.

⁴⁵Neil Postman, “The Blurring of Childhood and the Media,” *Religious Education* 82, no. 2 (1987): 294.

⁴⁶Similar questions were asked by Postman in Neil Postman, “Technology as Dazzling Distraction,” *The Education Digest* 59, no. 8 (1994): 25.

⁴⁷Postman’s writes, “We are involved here in a tradeoff. Technology giveth and technology taketh away. . . . I am pointing out that with every advance in technology there is an inevitable and harmful side-effect.” Neil Postman, “Will our Children Only Inherit the Wind?” *Theory and Research in Social*

becomes an important consideration for any online educator seeking to use technology within the online medium.

Explaining the difference between a technology and a medium, Postman comments, “A technology, in other words, is merely a machine. A medium is the social and intellectual environment a machine creates.”⁴⁸ It is important to keep in mind that the online medium is not the same as the face-to-face medium, and educators who do not recognize the significance of this do so at their own demise.

Neil Postman observes,

Technology can never be the end of learning. It is, has always been, and must always be the servant of human aspiration. To regard it as our master is as degrading as it is tempting. We will know how to employ technology in schools when we agree on the purpose of education, and not before. And we will agree on the purpose of education when we have reclaimed some great national dream which commands respect and devotion, and take hold of our children’s consciousness.⁴⁹

Continued advances in technology and continued accessibility of technology are growing factors of increased online education. These advances include access to the Internet and to computers. Related to increased access to technology is the increase of familiarity of individuals to these advances in technology. Consequently, individuals are becoming more comfortable communicating via advancing technology. In addition, online course design and curriculum development continue to increase. As Liu, Liao, and Pratt note, “Advances in e-learning technologies parallels a general increase in sophistication by computer users.”⁵⁰ Although the medium of online education is different from the medium of residential, face-to-face, learning, both mediums are continuing to move

Education 28, no. 4 (2000): 582.

⁴⁸Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 84, Kindle.

⁴⁹Postman, “Will Our Children Only Inherit the Wind?” 586.

⁵⁰Su-Houn Liu, Hsiu-Li Liao, and Jean A. Pratt, “Impact of Media Richness and Flow on E-Learning Technology Acceptance,” *Computers & Education* 52, no. 3 (2009): 599, doi:10.1016/j.compedu.2008.11.002.

toward one another by implementing aspects of online education into the residential classroom (i.e. electronic readings), and by implementing aspects of residential education (i.e. lectures and video-chat) into online courses.⁵¹ Additionally, Sun and Cheng affirm from their study that the media richness within online education should be matched to the complexity of the information being communicated. In both measures of learning and the satisfaction level of students within the course,

the course unit with high uncertainty and equivocality in content needs high richness media representation. On the other hand, it is ineffective to use high richness media to promote learning performance for the course unit with low uncertainty and equivocality that can be stated clearly in regular text.⁵²

Recognizing the online medium for ministerial training. It is important for educators to recognize that the medium of online pedagogy is different from the medium of traditional face-to-face pedagogy. As such, educators seeking to effectively educate through an online medium must select the proper communication channels. In addition, students must be aware of the differences between residential and online pedagogy. By recognizing the distinctive nature of the online medium, faculty and students can select the proper media richness in order to effectively communicate within the online medium; learning can take place through online pedagogy as long as the faculty and students both select the proper communication techniques. The role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution need not change in order to accommodate an online medium; however, recognizing the medium of online pedagogy will allow educators to begin to utilize the proper techniques to accomplish the goals of education. Specific to graduate-level ministerial training, formation of the student can still be accomplished through the online medium, as long as the faculty, the students, and the

⁵¹For an overview of common technologies available for online course development and the Course Management Platforms (CMP) available, see Shepherd and Martz, “Media Richness Theory.”

⁵²Pei-Chen Sun and Hsing Kenny Cheng, “The Design of Instructional Multimedia in E-Learning: A Media Richness Theory-Based Approach,” *Computers & Education* 49, no. 3 (2007): 673, doi:10.1016/j.compedu.2005.11.016.

overall institution are committed to utilizing the proper techniques for effective online pedagogy.

Utilizing the Medium of Online Learning

Simply recognizing that the medium of online learning is different from the medium of traditional face-to-face learning is not enough. Educators must learn how to effectively utilize the online medium. Research concerning the effective utilization of the medium of online education notes the importance of giving priority to pedagogy over technology, and has helped educators gain perspective on the importance of sound pedagogical principles within one's approach to teaching. These principles are often recognized as educators seek to establish the objectives of the online classroom, and as educators process through the many technologies available to them within the online teaching environment.

Putting pedagogy before technology. Richard Ascough stresses the need to ensure that an institution's technological advances should be "driven by sound pedagogical principles. . . . Putting pedagogy before technology will insure quality education no matter what the content or mode of delivery."⁵³ The author considers seven areas of online education: (1) "Parameters of online distance education" (17-19); (2) "Purposes of online distance education" (19-20); (3) "Planning of online courses" (20-23); (4) "Pedagogical possibilities in online distance education" (23-26); (5) "Pitfalls within online pedagogy" (26-27); (6) "Institutional faculty and student prerequisites for effective delivery of online courses" (27-28); and (7) "Predictions about the impact of online distance education" (28).

Ascough stresses that online education can be effective as long as the educator understands the medium through which the education is being processed (17), and he

⁵³Richard S. Ascough, "Designing for Online Distance Education: Putting Pedagogy before Technology," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 5, no. 1 (2002): 17, doi:10.1111/1467-9647.00114.

considers course design to be the most important aspect of online course delivery (20). He also recognizes the significance of distance education to the pedagogical environment: “If nothing else, the rise of online education has caused many of us to rethink our own pedagogical models. . . . Sound pedagogy is essential to the effectiveness of all of our teaching, no matter what the content or mode of delivery” (28). The objectives of the classroom and the role of the teacher within the learning environment are aspects of pedagogy that the rise of online learning has caused educators to consider.

Technology as a means to an end. Alan Hueth comments on the discussions surrounding online education and

argues that the present dialogue reflects reductionist and simplistic thinking, which hinders education in both traditional face-to-face and e-learning modes. . . . [He combines] the pedagogical methods of Jesus Christ . . . [and] reveals some important implications of this approach for both e-learning and ‘traditional’ face-to-face instruction for CHE [Christian Higher Education] instructors and administrators.⁵⁴

Hueth addresses what he identifies as oversimplified thinking by considering three “oversimplified, reductionist, and limiting notion[s]” (529-31): (1) “close Proximity guarantees learning” (529); (2) “learning is a simple task” (530); and (3) “e-learning is only about computers” (531).

Hueth provides a summary of this oversimplified thinking:

Learning is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that Christian educators need to acknowledge and understand in a more complete way. The notion of “distance” in education is not limited to proximity. Several other distances are involved in learning, community building, and faith-building in [Christian Higher Education]. We need to begin to view technology in a more complete way and as a means to an end. (533)

In addition, Hueth notes the significance of communication theories to education in general and online education specifically (533-37), and considers the examples provided by Jesus as the Master communicator (537-40), and also Jesus’

⁵⁴Alan C. Hueth, “E-Learning and Christian Higher Education: A War of the Worlds, or Lessons in Reductionism?” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 33, no. 4 (2004): 527.

teachings, particularly Jesus' non-verbal communications (540-44).

The idea of viewing technology as a means to an end is important for online graduate-level ministerial training, as the goal of spiritual formation should provide direction concerning the decisions made by educators. Viewing technology as a means to an end will allow the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution to be focused on the formation of students as ministers of the gospel.

Christ-centered learning and e-learning. Shauna Tonkin considers whether or not Christ-centered education is compatible with e-learning, and summarizes her conclusions by stating,

E-learning introduces philosophical and procedural differences in the teaching process that may seem at odds with the purpose of Christ-centered education. Although our understanding of e-learning is incomplete, the Internet can be a viable means of delivering instruction. This paper outlines a basic framework for creating and delivering online instruction in a manner compatible with our Christian values and perspectives.⁵⁵

The author provides a framework for designing and implementing online courses in what is called "A Christian Framework for Teaching & Learning in the Online Classroom" (559). Noted in the article is that pragmatic considerations are often associated with a university's decision to move to online education:

In many cases, survival becomes the highest value; efficiency and expediency are the means to that end. Adopting and integrating various technologies through the organization are seen as necessary requirements of a vibrant academic experience, and often this process is influenced more by market position than by a solid framework for effective teaching and learning. (559-60)

As foundational to the framework, Tonkin recognizes a Christian ethos of teaching and learning, and provides statements that serve as a "basic set of biblical values that foster learning in online as well as on-campus courses" (560): (1) "intellectual inquiry is mandated by Scripture and is a Christian virtue" (560); (2) "learning in community provides an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to transform our thinking" (561); (3) "respect

⁵⁵Shauna E. Tonkin, "The Christian Ethos and E-Learning," *Christian Scholar's Review* 33, no. 4 (2004): 557.

for others and respect for the teaching and learning process are required” (561); (4) “intellectual standards inspire hope rather than breed despair” (561); and (5) “failure is a possibility but not a destiny” (561).

The role of the professor shifts from providing information to students to “facilitating learning” (563). In addition, the article notes that students in e-learning environments are often more diverse than students in more traditional face-to-face settings (564). Other considerations are also provided such as learning activities for students and focusing on learning outcomes for students (564-66).

The way in which the role of the faculty member is viewed, and the way in which the objectives of the course are viewed, have implications for the use of the medium of online pedagogy. The faculty as a facilitator of learning, instead of an agent of formation within the life of the student, affects the manner in which the faculty member conducts the online course.

Digital technology in the theological classroom. Mary Hess addresses the use of technology to enhance teaching specifically within the realm of theological education, and stresses the aspect of community within online courses.⁵⁶

Hess argues that technology can assist a professor in six specific ways:

1. Provide a better environment for the learner
2. Provide more opportunities for students to collaborate
3. Provide teachers with a better understanding of the experiences students bring to the classroom
4. Provide accessibility to primary resources for research purposes
5. Provide a mechanism to overcome time and distance limitations
6. Provide a better context for communities of faith⁵⁷

By utilizing the medium of online learning, the faculty member can help establish communities of students for the purpose of collaboration and faith development.

⁵⁶Mary E. Hess, “What Difference Does It Make? Digital Technology in the Theological Classroom,” *Theological Education* 41, no. 1 (2005): 77-91.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 83-84.

In addition, the objectives of the classroom can be shaped within the online environment to help assist students to better achieve the goals of the course. The medium of online learning is enhanced through the development of learning communities where students can connect with one another.

Converting my course converted me. Lester Ruth demonstrates how a conversion of a course designed for a residential medium to a course designed for an online medium assisted in helping the author think through the nature of education.⁵⁸ The result was a renewed approach to all of his teaching (including residential). Reflecting on the impact of converting his course, and the subsequent change in his own teaching approach, the author now begins every new course preparation (online or residential) by considering how he would create a course for an online medium. One of the differences in Ruth's approach is the incorporation of discussions into his course. In designing the online course he realized, "Discussions were not some by-product intruding into my agenda for the course. They were the course. I had to manage them well" (237).

The course designed for an online medium forced Ruth to plan ahead and develop course schedules to fit into a module format, as he acknowledged that he had to think through the entire flow of the course, not just what the next lecture would be in the course. In addition, sequencing the course became very important to him in the online format of the course (237).

Ruth notes that within the online medium his role as a teacher was converted from the conveyer of information to the "creator of learning environments" (238). His online discussion became the focus of the course, and the readings for the course no longer assisted the student for better listening to the lectures, but rather, the readings in the course better prepared the students for engaging in the discussions for the course

⁵⁸Lester Ruth, "Converting My Course Converted Me: How Reinventing an On-Campus Course for an Online Environment Reinvigorated My Teaching," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 9, no. 4 (2006): 236-42, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9647.2006.00289.x.

(238). Ultimately, Ruth says he assumed the role of a “shepherd” to the students within the course (239).

The way in which the role of the student was viewed also changed—the student was no longer a passive listener or reader; rather, the student was now a participant in the learning process (240). In addition, the student in a typical online course is a different type of student from the traditional residential classroom, as the student in the online classroom has experience in the local church, and is actively involved in ministry (241). The change in perspective and approach to pedagogy as a result of designing a course for an online medium assisted Ruth in rethinking the objectives of the classroom, and also rethinking the role of the teacher.

Utilizing the online medium for ministerial training. Beyond just recognizing that online learning is a different medium from the residential medium, educators must utilize techniques and practices for the medium of online learning that lead to the effective education of students. These techniques and practices relate to the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and even the overall purpose of the institution, and can be incorporated for many different reasons. Within graduate-level ministerial training, the reason for the utilization of the medium of online learning should be the formation of students for increased effectiveness as ministers of the gospel.

Fostering Spiritual Formation within Online Medium

The need for the spiritual formation of students is a recognized benchmark and requirement for ATS schools,⁵⁹ and is a topic of much of the recent literature on online Christian education. However, the recognition of the need for spiritual formation is not enough; educators must demonstrate that spiritual formation is taking place within courses designed for an online medium. This need to demonstrate spiritual formation is

⁵⁹Association of Theological Schools, “Educational and Degree Program Standards,” G–40.

directly related to one's understanding of the nature of humanity, and one's understanding of how spiritual formation is accomplished. Whether through an online or residential medium of education, spiritual formation must be developed within students of graduate-level ministerial training.

Humanity as spiritual machines or personal bodies. David Kelsey addresses distance education by considering the theological foundations of distance education:

This essay tries to show how following that advice [the framing of the discussion on distance education in theological terms] can make a practical difference in assessing the merits of distance learning. It does so by raising questions about the theological-anthropological assumptions, respectively, or theological education and distance learning.⁶⁰

Kelsey focuses on more than just the education of clergy, and includes undergraduate and graduate forms of Christian theological education. He also notes that he is not arguing for or against distanced education, but rather,

[His] aim is to exhibit the fruitful difference it may make if analyses of proposed changes in Christian theological education are framed in explicitly doctrinal theological terms so that discussion of their merits is conducted as a discussion of what is theological about theological education. (3)

Kelsey recognizes this need for a theological foundation behind education, and understands that this foundation affects the way in which spiritual formation is conducted within programs and courses.

Kelsey addresses what he refers to as two “questionable assumptions” about theological education. The first questionable assumption is that “what makes theological education theological is its goal of preparing students for the roles filled by clergy” (4). The second questionable assumption relates to the “movement of theological schooling” from theory to practice (4). Instead, Kelsey offers his own suggestion of the goal of theological education: “The over-arching goal that unifies the practices making up

⁶⁰David H. Kelsey, “Spiritual Machines, Personal Bodies, and God: Theological Education and Theological Anthropology,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 5, no. 1 (2002): 2, doi:10.1111/1467-9647.00112.

Christian theological education is to understand God more truly” (6). This would include

the mastery of core Christian concepts like reconciliation, grace, sin, forgiveness, love, hope, faith. . . . What theological schooling provides should be the cultivation of student’s abilities to use such concepts both to articulate a vision, a synoptic view of the world and our lives in relation to God, and to discern with precision the lineaments of concrete, particular situations in people’s lives in the light of faith’s witness to God and God’s relation to all else. (5)

The author ends the article with a question about the very nature of mankind:

“The question I am posing is whether the anthropological assumptions that help keep theological education theological see students as spiritual machines or as personal bodies” (8). The answer to the question helps to shape the educational philosophies of institutions, and can potentially determine the extent to which distance education can be embraced for particular aspects of theological education (8-9).

The role of faculty in promoting spiritual formation. Roger White considers matters related to spiritual formation through distance education. The author summarizes his article by stating, “Although Christ and computer at first seem incompatible, spiritual formation can be nurtured in distance education through the creative ways in which faculty and students interact.”⁶¹ White considers Paul’s letters from a distance as an indication of the ability to bring about spiritual formation from a distance (307-9).

The author also provides a list of assumptions about online teaching. These assumptions relate to the ability of educators to bring about spiritual formation among students, and seek to bridge the gap between residential and online mediums of education. White suggests, (1) “Sound pedagogical methods, skills, and strategies established in traditional classrooms can translate to the online classroom” (309); (2) “motivational issues and involvement levels are important variables to online course success” (310); and (3) “a sense of community can and does occur on the Internet” (310).

The article concludes with suggestions to foster spiritual formation in distance

⁶¹Roger White, “Promoting Spiritual Formation in Distance Education,” *Christian Education Journal* 3, no. 2 (2006): 303.

learning classes. These suggestions include the faculty being intentional about the spiritual formation of students by stating formation as a goal of the course, the faculty member modeling vulnerability and formation to students through interaction with students, and also implementing community within the course (311-14). The role of the faculty member is seen as important to the spiritual development of students within the online medium of education.

The divine pedagogy. John Gresham addresses concerns with the format of online education and stresses the need for online education to have “deep theological justification.”⁶² Gresham explains the idea of the divine pedagogy is the understanding of how God teaches humanity. His work is written as a response to criticism of online education, due in large part from a perceived lack of the ability of a professor to act in an incarnational manner to one’s students (24).

Gresham roots pedagogy in the revelation of God, and ultimately in the incarnational character of Christ. He also recognizes that the church must engage culture by noting, “The Church is called to adapt her message to the circumstances of her audience according to their age, culture, and social environment” (25). Gresham believes online education is a natural next step for education, and stresses online education attends to the needs of students where they are, and also places education in the public forum (online media) (25-26).

Gresham notes online education allows the professor to demonstrate humility. Instead of making the student come to the professor, quite literally the professor is now willing to go to the student. In this sense, the incarnational example of Christ can be evidenced within the online classroom as professors model the ability to communicate to students in an online format. Gresham writes that the “key is the instructor’s

⁶²John Gresham, “The Divine Pedagogy as a Model for Online Education,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 9, no. 1 (2006): 24, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9647.2006.00257.x.

communication rather than the educational environment” (26). It is important to note Gresham acknowledges that “while physical presence is crucial to certain aspects of an incarnational faith, it does not seem to be an essential factor in an incarnational pedagogy” (27).

This understanding of the professor modeling the incarnation of Christ is an important consideration for online graduate-level ministerial training. If spiritual formation is to take place within courses utilizing an online medium, the role of the faculty member must be seen as more than just facilitating learning to students. In addition, the objectives of the course must be more than just transferring information. The course must be designed to bring about the transformation of students.

Spiritual formation through the ecology of learning. Stephen Lowe and Mary Lowe argue for the possibility of spiritual formation regardless of medium of education.⁶³ The authors reflect on the nature of *spiritual development* within ATS institutions, and acknowledge there are diverse ways to define spiritual development (86-87). However, the authors also note that ATS schools must address the need for spiritual development of students throughout the students’ program of study, regardless of the medium of education (87).

The authors explain the ecosystems approach as “looking at the created order or at human beings (human ecology) from an ecosystems orientation encompasses both the part and the whole. One is not sacrificed to the other because both are important for a more complete and thorough understanding of reality” (88). They also note the importance of both individual and corporate aspects of spiritual formation (90). Lowe and Lowe utilize the work of Bronfenbrenner concerning spiritual formation (91), and stress aspects of interconnectedness and reciprocity among students within educational

⁶³Stephen D. Lowe and Mary E. Lowe, “Spiritual Formation in Theological Distance Education: An Ecosystems Model,” *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 1 (2010): 85.

environments (93).

In addition, the authors stress the larger ecosystem outside of just the theological institution. Noting the importance of social, church, and familiar aspects of one's ecosystem:

We often wrongly assume that the greatest impact on a student's faith formation while in seminary is from the seminary experience. This study and the ecosystems model we are proposing would caution us against such an unfounded assumption. The seminary experience is one part of a student's larger ecosystem. (99)

The recognition of the larger ecosystem of the student is an important consideration for educators. Spiritual formation is not limited just to the classroom, and courses and programs designed for an online medium should take into consideration not only the past experiences that students bring to the course, but also the current (and future) experiences students will have related to their ministerial training.

Online ministerial training as a necessity. Marilyn Naidoo creates a “conceptual map of the theological and pedagogical challenges for ministerial formation and highlights how the possibility of formation is being carried out in the distance-learning environment.”⁶⁴ The author notes within Africa, much of the attention concerning distance education has been focused on the doing of the work rather than what exactly is being done,⁶⁵ and that theological education typically relates to whole person development.⁶⁶

Although Naidoo notes both theological and sociological objections to distance education, the article concludes by recognizing a need for distance education:

As technology advances, so does the prospect of developing and incorporating online education not only as a possibility but also a necessity. Educators can

⁶⁴Marilyn Naidoo, “Ministerial Formation of Theological Students through Distance Education,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 68, no. 2 (2012): 1.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

motivate growth and provide support for the personal, spiritual and ministerial growth of the student. Doing so at a distance calls for new forms and efforts.⁶⁷

This recognition of the potential for formation within online education is important to consider. However, as the author suggests, to effectively educate at a distance the medium of online learning will need to be considered, and changes will need to be made to the way graduate-level ministerial training is conducted.

Modeling spiritual formation from a distance. Benjamin Forrest and Mark Lamport consider the spiritual formation evidenced within Paul’s correspondence with the Christians at Rome in the writing of the book of Romans: “Paul’s spiritual formation of the Roman Christians offers Christian educators insight into how this process can be approached even from a distance.”⁶⁸ Although not an online format of delivery, Paul’s letters were a form of distance education.

Forrest and Lamport provide a summary of the literature concerning spiritual formation from a distance.⁶⁹ In addition, it is noted that Paul’s letter to the Christians at Rome predated his physical presence in Rome. Eight implications for spiritual formation from a distance are presented, and among the implications are the “ground for spiritual formation is the gospel,”⁷⁰ and the “location of spiritual formation is community.”⁷¹ These considerations are important for online graduate-level ministerial training, as the need for spiritual formation is a recognized aspect of ministerial training, and the development of community within online learning environments is a noted strategy for connecting students to each other and to the faculty.

⁶⁷Ibid., 7.

⁶⁸Benjamin K. Forrest and Mark A. Lamport, “Modeling Spiritual Formation from a Distance: Paul’s Formation Transactions with the Roman Christians,” *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 1 (2013): 110.

⁶⁹Ibid., 111-14.

⁷⁰Ibid., 116.

⁷¹Ibid., 117.

Fostering spiritual formation within online learning. The need for spiritual formation within graduate-level ministerial training is well established within the literature base. This formation can take place through the efforts of the course design, the involvement of the faculty, or the implementation of a larger ecosystems approach; however, recognized within all of these strategies is a view of mankind that acknowledges the need for spiritual development. Educators must understand both the medium of online learning and the nature of mankind in order to effectively focus on the development of spiritual formation through the medium of online learning. These theological, technological, and pedagogical considerations are all important for educators seeking to effectively focus the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution on the spiritual formation of students as ministers of the gospel.

Combining Theology, Pedagogy, and Technology

Although there is much within the literature base recognizing the medium of online education, recognizing techniques for utilizing the online medium for teaching, and recognizing the need for spiritual formation through online pedagogy, few resources seek to combine the theological, pedagogical, and technological aspects of online ministerial training. Too often one of these aspects is either overlooked or assumed within the literature. Steve Delamarter et al.'s 2007 article, "Technology, Pedagogy, and Transformation in Theological Education: Five Case Studies," speaks to the nature of transformation within the lives of students, and speaks to the intersection of theology, pedagogy, and technology.⁷² The authors explain two types of transformation within the lives of students: "The relationship between type I and type II transformation is simple: we embrace type I transformation (transformation *in* education) in order to achieve type

⁷²Steve Delamarter et al., "Technology, Pedagogy, and Transformation in Theological Education: Five Case Studies," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 10, no. 2 (2007): 64, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9647.2007.00319.x.

II transformation (transformation *through* education).”⁷³ The authors also note the importance of not just technological and pedagogical considerations, but also theological considerations: “Indeed, we believe that attention to pedagogy and technology in theological education carries with it a specialized set of *theological* challenges that must be named and addressed.”⁷⁴

Of particular interest is Case Study 4 in the article, written by Russell Haitch. This section of the article speaks of the deep theological roots of online education, specifically dealing with the Trinitarian understanding of body, soul, and spirit.⁷⁵ In addition, the work addresses Kelsey’s (2002) article focusing on students as “spiritual machines” or “complex organic bodies.”⁷⁶ This work is helpful and important, and similar works of research are needed to assist educators with navigating the challenges facing online graduate-level ministerial training.

Best practices of online Christian education. Another piece of literature seeking to fill the gap related to the intersection of theology, pedagogy, and technology is the work of Mark Maddix, James Estep, and Mary Lowe. The nature of the resource is to provide an introduction to best practices for online Christian higher education. The authors explain the purpose and outline of the book:

We hope this book provides teachers and administrators with a practical guide for developing effective online courses and programs. We believe this book provides both a theoretical and practical framework for generating and facilitating online education.”⁷⁷

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid., 65.

⁷⁵Ibid., 72-76.

⁷⁶Ibid., 73.

⁷⁷Mark A. Maddix, James Estep, and Mary Ella Lowe, eds., *Best Practices of Online Education: A Guide for Christian Higher Education* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age, 2012), xii.

The work is divided into three sections: Section I – Theoretical and Theological Foundations of Online Education, Section II – Generating and Facilitating Effective Learning in Online Education, and Section III – Developing and Assessing Online Courses and Programs.⁷⁸ In addition, the book is intended to provide an overview of the theoretical considerations for institutions involved in Christian online education, and practical points of application for those interested in starting or enhancing their school’s online education.

The theological foundations for online education are also addressed in the work. However, as will be further developed in chapter 4 of this current research project, the first section of the book starts with the theoretical, instead of the theological. Also, the theological information provided in the book is in part limited to the aspects of spiritual formation and community building—both of which are important to online Christian education, but do not represent a comprehensive perspective, or articulation, of theological anthropology’s contribution to online pedagogy. Overall, the book fails to articulate an understanding of a theological framework that guides all of an institution’s decisions regarding online education.

The resource evidences deficiencies in the articulation of a theological foundation, particularly related to the practice of the integration of faith and learning and in regard to the primacy of Scripture. Three primary weaknesses that result from these deficiencies are a reduction in the role of the faculty to a facilitator of learning, a reduction in the objectives of the classroom to the transferring of information, and a reduction in the purpose of the institution to pragmatic efficiency. There is a need for a biblical-theological framework for the intersection of theology, pedagogy, and technology so that best practices of online graduate-level ministerial training can be presented in such a way that the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and

⁷⁸Ibid., xi.

the purpose of the institution are focused more effectively on the formation of students as ministers of the gospel.

David Powlison's Three Epistemological Priorities

David Powlison, writing particularly in the field of counseling, believes finding an answer to the questions of the integration of biblical truth and social-scientific theory comes from taking a detailed look within the pages of Scripture.⁷⁹ In explaining the arena of Christian counseling, Powlison categorizes the approaches into two broad areas. One approach, labeled VITEX (for vital-external contributions), notes Christians should seek to have a balanced integration of biblical truth and social-scientific theories.⁸⁰ This category of counselors holds to an understanding that theories provide vital external contributions to understanding humanity, and to the creation of a model for counseling.

Another group, labeled COMPIN (for comprehensive-internal resources), argues the Christian faith provides adequate resources for the development of a model, apart from the contribution of the social sciences. Powlison notes, "Scripture is sufficient, not in that it is exhaustive, containing all knowledge, but in that it rightly aligns a coherent and comprehensive system of counseling that is radically at odds with every atheistic model."⁸¹

Powlison's epistemological priorities serve as a model for pedagogical engagement, because his model provides the process by which educators can ground the theological anthropology considerations behind education in a biblical view of humanity.

⁷⁹Powlison, "Questions at the Crossroads."

⁸⁰For examples within the evangelical community, see James R. Estep, Michael Anthony, and Greg Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education* (Nashville: B & H, 2008); and James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim, eds., *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development* (Nashville: B & H, 2010). In these resources, Estep provides what he calls a "Spectrum of Integration" which combines both Scripture and social scientific theories. The spectrum varies from *disintegration* between the two, to *paradigmatic*, which utilizes social sciences and theology simultaneously and interactively.

⁸¹Powlison, "Questions at the Crossroads," 32-33.

Powlison's three priorities are

1. The first priority: articulating biblical truth and developing a systematic theology of care for the soul.
2. The second priority: exposing, debunking and reinterpreting alternative models.
3. The third priority: learning what we can from defective models.⁸²

It is acknowledged that the original context of Powlison's priorities is care for the soul; however, Powlison's model can be applied to other arenas, such as educational institutions, and, even more specifically, certain areas of learning within an educational institution, and even online pedagogy.⁸³ As Powlison states, "We traffic in the extrabiblical constructively when we know what we ought to know reorients and controls our view."⁸⁴ By considering Powlison's epistemological priorities, attention can be given to the theological foundation upon which online graduate-level ministerial training should be built.

Powlison applies his approach to establishing a true biblical foundation in his book, *Seeing with New Eyes*. While explaining the need for a conceptual framework for a model of counseling, Powlison states,

The biblical model is more than one more "model," conceptual system, or personality theory among many. Truth mediates a Person, a working Redeemer. To be human is to love a Savior, Father, Master, and Lord. Instead of "psychopathology" and "syndromes," we see "sins" against this Person, and we see sufferings that are "trials" revealing our needs for a true Deliverer and refuge.⁸⁵

Powlison's COMPIN model serves as an alternative to a pure integrationist perspective, and recognizes the need to address the theological foundation behind the social sciences. Utilizing Powlison's model as a biblical-theological framework allows for the effective

⁸²Ibid., 34-35.

⁸³Brenna Mae Whitley, "Applying A Comprehensive-Internal Model for the Evaluation of Social-Scientific Research to the Identify Crisis Stage of Erik Erikson's Developmental Theory" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009).

⁸⁴Powlison, "Questions at the Crossroads," 35.

⁸⁵David Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2012), 106, Kindle.

intersection of theology, pedagogy, and technology for institutions offering courses and programs for online graduate-level ministerial training.

CHAPTER 3

ARTICULATING BIBLICAL TRUTH ABOUT THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

This chapter focuses on David Powlison’s first epistemological priority—articulating biblical truth—as it applies to online graduate-level ministerial training. Historical considerations and implications of the doctrine of the image of God are articulated and considered in light of the implications for providing a foundation for online graduate-level ministerial training. The image of God as seen through the metanarrative of Scripture is addressed, which demonstrates that after the fall of humankind into sin there is a need for the renewal of the image of God through the redemptive work of Christ. This renewal of the image of God is spoken of within the New Testament as formation into the image of Christ, who is presented within the Scriptures as being the exact image of God. Considering the need for the renewed image to be formed within individuals, the chapter concludes with implications of a biblical view of human nature for graduate-level ministerial training in the areas of the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution. Using the apostle Paul as an example, it is clear that the role of the faculty member should be that of a model for students to follow, the objectives of the classroom should be focused on the formation of students, and the purpose of the institution should be on ministerial effectiveness.¹

¹Implications of theological anthropology are considered in this chapter. Chapter 4 of this research project will consider deficiencies in the articulation of a theological foundation particularly related to the practice of the integration of faith and learning and specifically in regard to the primacy of Scripture. It will be demonstrated that three primary weaknesses result from these deficiencies: a reduction in the role of the faculty to a facilitator of learning, a reduction in the objectives of the classroom to the transferring of information, and a reduction in the purpose of the institution to pragmatic efficiency. Chapter 5 of this research project will consider practical points of application that assist the faculty member concerning the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution.

The spiritual formation of students stands as one of the defining standards of M.Div. programs offered through ATS institutions.² As such, it is important for educators to have a clear understanding of the goal of spiritual formation, which (it will be argued in this chapter), is formation into the image of Christ. Forrest and Lamport state,

Spiritual formation, we contend, is the process of coming to grips with our finite humanness and developing an understanding that our sufficiency lies in the person of Christ. This definition represents the “transformed mind” that Paul describes in Romans 12. The result of this type of transformation is an understanding that our position and sufficiency are wholly and completely dependent upon Christ and what he has completed for us in his death and resurrection.³

Formation is an important consideration for online graduate-level ministerial training. The biblical understanding of formation into the image of Christ has implications for an educator’s understanding of the role of the faculty member, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution. In the following chapter, it will be argued that the implications of a biblical understanding of the image of God are that the role of the faculty member moves beyond being a guide for students to being a model of spiritual formation for students to follow; the objectives of the classroom move beyond student learning to student formation into the image of Christ, and the purpose of the institution moves beyond pragmatic efficiency for courses and programs to the ministerial effectiveness of the student.

The Nature and Function of the Image of God

The nature and function of the image of God is the central doctrine to understanding theological anthropology.⁴ As such, the educator must have a robust

²Association of Theological Schools, “Educational and Degree Program Standards,” G–40, accessed September 26, 2014, <http://www.ats.edu/uploads/accrediting/documents/educational-and-degree-program-standards.pdf>.

³Benjamin K. Forrest and Mark A. Lamport, “Modeling Spiritual Formation from a Distance: Paul’s Formation Transactions with the Roman Christians,” *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 1 (2013): 111.

⁴Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 657.

understanding of the nature and function of the image of God in order to consider the implications of theological anthropology for the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution. In the following section, the biblical teachings on the image of God are presented, followed by an overview of the historical understandings of the doctrine. Finally, the relationship to God is further explored using the example of Psalm 8 as a reference to the importance of mankind's creation in the image of God. It is demonstrated within this study that for the Christian educator, Christ defines and determines what spiritual formation looks like in the life of the believer, as Christ is the perfect image of God (Col 1:15; Heb 1:3), and it is into his image that Christians are to be transformed (Rom 12:1-2).

Biblical Teaching on *Imago Dei*

The first reference to mankind's creation in the image of God is found in Genesis 1:26, and in even a casual reading of Genesis 1, the contrast between the events of days 1-5 and day 6 is evident. There is something out of the ordinary about the creation of humanity in Genesis 1, and this is further solidified when one considers that the entire text of Genesis 2 is devoted to a further explanation of the events of day 6. Nahum Sarna concludes, "A human being is the pinnacle of Creation."⁵ As recorded in Scripture, the following words culminate the creation account in Genesis 1:26-27:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

The meaning of "image" and "likeness." An investigation into the meaning of the words "image" and "likeness" used in Genesis 1:26, 27 helps to determine the

⁵Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1989), 11.

words' theological significance. Referring to the usage of "image," Westermann echoes most commentators with his understanding that image can mean a statue, as in 2 Chronicles 23:17, or an image of the gods, as in Ezekiel 7:20.⁶ In a similar way, the meaning of "likeness" is well established. As noted by Gerhard von Rad, "'Likeness' is a verbal abstraction and means predominantly something abstract: 'appearance,' 'similarity,' or 'analogy.'"⁷ The meanings *image* and *likeness* help to establish the importance of mankind's creation, yet questions remain as to whether or not the words are synonymous within the context of mankind's creation.

Although commentators continue to debate whether *image* and *likeness* are to be used interchangeably, both words are used in Genesis 1:26 and Genesis 5:3, which indicates a significance to both words being used. In commenting on the meanings of image and likeness, Peter Gentry notes that *likeness* speaks to Adam being a son of God, and *image* speaks to Adam being a "servant king."⁸ As such, Gentry's understanding that both words are to be interpreted in reference to relationship appears accurate. Skinner also supports a distinction between image and likeness, yet concludes that likeness to God is not something actually realized within creation.⁹ Gentry opposes Keil and Delitzsch, who conclude that the two words are used interchangeably.¹⁰ Among those

⁶Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 146.

⁷Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1973), 57–58.

⁸Peter Gentry, "Kingdom through Covenant," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 28–29.

⁹John Skinner, *Genesis*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1910), 32.

¹⁰C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), 63.

agreeing with Keil and Delitzsch are Wenham¹¹ and Collins;¹² however, the fact that more than one passage uses both image and likeness would indicate significance to both words being used. Image and likeness appear to represent two connected, yet distinct, relationships—mankind’s relationship to God, and mankind’s relationship to God’s creation. For the Christian educator, the importance of a relationship with God and with others within the context of spiritual formation is essential.

Historical Understandings of the *Imago Dei*

Gregg Allison explains the historical factors influencing the interpretation of the image of God using four periods of history: the early church, the Middle Ages, the reformation and post-reformation, and the modern period.¹³ Concerning the early church period, Allison explains that the New Testament writers recognized the aspects of both human dignity and human depravity as related to the image of God. The sanctification process is being “progressively conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18).”¹⁴ In addition, the New Testament writers affirmed an understanding of both material and immaterial aspects of humanity.

John Calvin did not distinguish between the image and likeness of God.¹⁵ Calvin believed that, due to the fall of man, the supernatural gifts of God and the image of God must be restored through salvation. He also noted the significance of loving

¹¹Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 30.

¹²C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006), 62.

¹³Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine: A Companion to Wayne Grudem’s Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011).

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 322.

¹⁵Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 45.

others as an acknowledgment for mankind's creation in the image of God.¹⁶

In the modern era, the understanding of human nature is not necessarily based on a theological foundation; rather, psychology, philosophy, and anthropology are studied apart from a theological foundation.¹⁷ Within this era, there is an emphasis on the understanding of the image of God being connected to mankind's relatedness to God and to each other. This concept of relatedness is seen in the works of Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and G. C. Berkouwer.¹⁸ Hoekema places the image of God within the context of "man's threefold relationship: toward God, toward others, and toward nature."¹⁹ This view of relatedness as an explanation for understanding the image of God is also advanced by biblical scholars' understanding of Ancient Near Eastern culture, which is a concept explored in greater detail in the following pages.²⁰

Within the modern era, biblical commentators and theologians have also attempted to explain the essence of mankind's creation in the image of God.²¹ Five primary views are presented as possible explanations for the image of God.²² The *substantival* view indicates that there is an attribute or characteristic of the individual consisting of the image of God; something the human *is*. The *functional* view relates to something that a

¹⁶Allison, *Historical Theology*, 332–33.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 334–35.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 337; Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 52–53.

¹⁹Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 95.

²⁰Allison, *Historical Theology*, 338.

²¹Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 148–153; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 29–32.

²²Millard Erickson arranges the views under three headings, substantive, relational, and functional; however, Gregg Allison and James Estep divide the various views into four categories, substantival, functional, relational, and teleological, and Michael Bird presents various views including the royal view. Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); James R. Estep, Michael Anthony, and Greg Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education* (Nashville: B & H, 2008); James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim, eds., *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development* (Nashville: B & H, 2010); Bird, *Evangelical Theology*.

human *does*. The *relational* view focuses on a human being's relationship with God or others. The *teleological* view speaks of the destiny of humans.²³ The *royal* view "means that humanity is royal and is created to rule."²⁴

Considering the historical understandings of the doctrine of mankind's creation in the image of God, it is evident that there is much discussion as to the nature and function of the image of God. In general, scholarship on the image of God evidences that mankind's creation in the image of God means that mankind is unique among God's creation. In addition, most theologians throughout church history believe that the image of God remained within humanity after the fall of mankind as recorded in Genesis 3. Although numerous theories are presented within scholarship as to the precise meaning of the image of God, many commentators note that the image of God indicates elements of one's relationship to God and one's relationship to God's creation. The understanding of the uniqueness of humanity among God's creation, and the aspect of relatedness to God and others, has implications for Christian educators within the context of graduate-level ministerial training.

The *Imago Dei* in its Ancient Near Eastern Historical Context

A review of the biblical and historical context pertaining to mankind's creation in the image of God would not be complete without also considering the Ancient Near Eastern context within which the book of Genesis was written. Gentry presents a compelling argument related to the historical significance of the idea of an "image" in the Ancient Near Eastern world. Commenting on the work of Paul Dion related to the image of God, Gentry stresses not the *physical appearance*, but rather the *behavior* of the gods as evidenced in those bearing their image in the Ancient Near Eastern context. He

²³Estep, Anthony, and Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education*, 179–80.

²⁴Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 659.

concludes that within that context, the image of God would “communicate two main ideas (1) rulership and (2) sonship.”²⁵ Similarly, Sarna notes the importance of royal language and comments that contrary to only the ruling monarch being in the image of God, from a biblical perspective, “each person bears the stamp of royalty.”²⁶ Hamilton and Wenham are in general agreement with the significance of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian societies.²⁷ This *royal view* of the image of God applies not only to a nation’s king, but to all of humanity, meaning there is equality among humanity in the way in which one relates to God, to each other, and to God’s creation. This aspect of relatedness to God and to creation is an important consideration for graduate-level ministerial training, as the nature of ministerial training is interaction with God, with others, and with God’s creation. How educators view students, and how students view others are important considerations.

The *Imago Dei*: Son-ship and Ruler-ship

Consistent with the natural interpretation of “image” throughout the Old Testament, the *imago Dei* is at times interpreted as a physical representation of God on earth. Gentry stresses the physical aspect, but notes that the image “goes far beyond being merely physical.”²⁸ This view is supported by a number of scholars,²⁹ but is rejected by Keil and Delitzsch, who instead view the image of God to consist “in the spiritual

²⁵Gentry, “Kingdom through Covenant,” 27.

²⁶Sarna, *Genesis*, 12.

²⁷Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 137; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 31–32.

²⁸Gentry, “Kingdom through Covenant,” 32.

²⁹Skinner, *Genesis*, 12; Von Rad, *Genesis*, 60; Hermann Gunkel et al., *Genesis* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 113; Sarna, *Genesis*, 12.

personality of man.”³⁰ William Reyburn and Euan Fry suggest the image of God is both spiritual and physical.³¹ The divine edict against murder in Genesis 9:6 also supports an understanding of the physical aspect of the image of God, because it is an edict against the abuse of the physical aspect of man (Jas 3:9 appeals to the image of God related to man’s physical being). Many other references to the *imago Dei* in Scripture are in the context of a physical manifestation (e.g. Christ as revealing the invisible Father in John 14:9 and Col 1:15), or of the exercising of dominion (Ps 8; 1 Cor 11:7; Col 1:15-20). Both Claus Westermann and Gordon Wenham provide an overview of the numerous positions.³² Many commentators also address the question of dominion, and although David Cotter suggests the image *is* mankind’s ability to have dominion,³³ most commentaries view the exercising of dominion as a *result* of mankind’s being created in the image of God, and not the image itself.³⁴

In attempting to conclude what humanity’s creation in the image of God means, Hamilton notes, “Any approach that focuses on one aspects of man—be that physical, spiritual, or intellectual—to the neglect of the rest of man's constituent features seems doomed to failure.”³⁵ Allison likewise challenges any view that would “reduce the image of God to one particular part or aspect of our humanness.”³⁶ Additionally, Millard

³⁰Keil and Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, 63–64.

³¹William D. Reyburn and Euan McG Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis*, UBS Handbooks (New York: United Bible Societies, 1997), 50.

³²Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 148–153; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 29–32.

³³David W. Cotter, *Genesis*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 2003), 18.

³⁴Umberto Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis I-VI* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1978), 58; Keil and Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, 64; Skinner, *Genesis*, 32; Von Rad, *Genesis*, 59; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 32; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 153.

³⁵Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, 137.

³⁶Estep, Anthony, and Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education*, 180.

Erickson indicates,

The image is something in the very nature of humans, in the way they were made. It refers to something a human *is* rather than something a human *has* or *does*. By virtue of being human, one is in the image of God; it is not dependent upon the presence of anything else.³⁷

Hoekema and Gentry have similar indications as part of their conclusions on the image of God. Hoekema states, “The image of God . . . describes not just something that man *has*, but something man *is*.” Similarly, Gentry expresses this view within the context of his discussion on the man being created *in* the image of God. Gentry indicates, “Man *is* the divine image.”³⁸ Gentry and Wellum also explain that creation in the image of God “defines a divine-human relationship” with a vertical and a horizontal dimension.³⁹ Mankind rules over God’s creation as a result of being created in the image of God, but that ruling is not the essence of the divine image.⁴⁰ Sarna indicates the image of God is “the symbol of God’s presence on earth.”⁴¹ Additionally, Hamilton notes the significance of the image of God as contrasted to other nations.⁴²

In conclusion, the image of God is the condition of being in which humanity was created. It does not specify one aspect in particular about the individual, but rather, speaks of the person as a whole. Genesis 9:6 makes it clear that the image of God remained after the fall of man, and after the flood, as does James 3:9. Mankind relates to God and to others as a result of being created in the image of God, and it is the foundation from which mankind exercises dominion over the rest of God’s creation. Mankind is the

³⁷Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 532.

³⁸Gentry, “Kingdom through Covenant,” 32.

³⁹Peter John Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 200.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 200–1.

⁴¹Sarna, *Genesis*, 12.

⁴²Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, 135.

representation of God to the rest of creation, neither taking away the significance of God's rightful place of supremacy, nor denying the general revelation of God as seen throughout the rest of his creation. It is because of the image of God that humanity is God's vice-regent on earth, in order to accomplish God's desires for God's creation. For the Christian educator, humanity's creation in the image of God, and the resulting relationship to God, to others, and to creation, become important components to consider. The role the of faculty member, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution are all influenced by the recognition of the dignity and relationship inherent within humanity as a result of creation in the image of God. In addition, humanity's God-given place of dominion over God's creation is a direct result of humanity's creation in the image of God.

Example of Psalm 8: The Emphasis Is God

Ultimately, to be created in the image of God is not merely a statement about humanity, as though mankind was at the center of creation, but instead, it is a statement about God. As the Psalmist reflects on the creation of mankind in Psalm 8, he is moved not to the greatness of man, but to the greatness of God. An adoration for God bookends the chapter: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" Mankind is but a piece (albeit a significant piece) of God's creation. Collins clarifies this by reminding his readers of the other uses of the image of God throughout Scripture, which he explains are related to mankind in the image of God, Christ as the perfect image of God, and the transforming of believers into the image of God.⁴³ As God reminds Job in Job 38, there is a bigger picture to be embraced.

Psalm 8:3-4 reads, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" In commenting on the significance of Psalm

⁴³Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 63.

8:3, Peter Craigie states that mankind's position is not innate to him, but rather God-given.⁴⁴ Similarly, Arthur Weiser mentions, "Face to face with God man becomes aware of the total insignificance of his existence."⁴⁵ He goes on to reflect on the image of God (although not explicitly stated in Ps 8, a comparison of Gen 1 is evidenced). Weiser proclaims it is not man's ability that leads to dominion over creation, but rather God's design.⁴⁶

In a similar statement, Konrad Schaefer affirms both the image of God in Psalm 8, and the significance of God's sovereign rule over creation. In speaking of Psalm 8, he contends that humanity should not be led to pride, but rather praise for the greatness of God.⁴⁷ All of this to enforce Graeme Goldsworthy's conclusion that "at its simplest, the kingdom of God refers to God ruling."⁴⁸ Consequently, the point of reflecting on the *imago Dei* is not humanity; the point is God. The Bible is not a story of man and his works; it is the revelation of God and his action and interaction with his creation. The hero of the story is God, and the King on the throne is Jesus Christ. The glory of God should cause humanity to bow down in awe of their creator and sustainer. For the Christian educator, the ultimate purpose of education should be to glorify God, and the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution should be designed with God's glory in mind. Consequently, formation of the individual is not ultimately for the sake of the individual, but ultimately, the purpose of formation is for the glory of God. The elevation of God is further solidified when considering the New

⁴⁴Peter Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 107-8.

⁴⁵Artur Weiser, *Psalms*, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1962), 143.

⁴⁶Ibid., 144-45.

⁴⁷Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2001).

⁴⁸Graeme Goldsworthy, "The Kingdom of God as Hermeneutic Grid," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2004): 7.

Testament presentation of the person and work of Jesus, and mankind's relationship to Jesus (Col 1:15; Heb 1:3).

Jesus Christ: The Image of God

The uniqueness of mankind's creation in the image of God is further explained by considering the person of Christ. Speaking of Christ, Hebrews 1:3 calls Christ the "exact imprint" of God's nature, and Colossians 1:15 states that Jesus is the "image of the invisible God." In addition, Romans 8:29 states, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." Commenting on this text, Hoekema concludes, "Since the Son, as we have just seen, is the perfect image of God the Father, we will not do violence to the text if we interpret the expression 'image of his Son' as being equivalent to 'image of God.'"⁴⁹ Considering the importance of Jesus as the image of God, the call of the Christian is to be conformed into the image of Christ, which is to say that the image of God is not only a defining aspect of theological anthropology,⁵⁰ but also a defining aspect of the Christian life, as the believer is conformed into the image of Christ.

Bruce Ware reminds his readers that humanity's relationship with God stands apart from any other relationship, and that humanity should allow God to define that relationship.⁵¹ Colossians 1 speaks of Christ as being in the image of God, and then talks about his ruling over the world, and holding the world together. A biblical understanding of Christ's role will go far to clarify the relationship of divine sovereignty to humanity:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For everything was created by Him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and by Him all things hold together. He is also the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning, the firstborn from the

⁴⁹Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 23.

⁵⁰Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 657.

⁵¹Bruce A. Ware, *God's Greater Glory: The Exulted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004).

dead, so that He might come to have first place in everything. For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile everything to Himself by making peace through the blood of His cross—whether things on earth or things in heaven. (Col 1:15-20)

Special consideration should be given to two words within the text. First, is the question of the Greek word translated “image” in verse 15. James Dunn, and Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke provide an overview of the Greek uses of *image*.⁵² Barth and Blanke conclude that the significance of the term stands in Christ’s relationship to all of creation, and not primarily to God the Father, due in large part to the combination of “image” with the “firstborn of all creation.”⁵³ O’Brien disagrees with that interpretation and notes the significance of the fact that Paul only uses the word here and in 2 Corinthians 4:4 when referring to Christ. In addition, he states,

The very nature and character of God have been perfectly revealed in him [Christ]; in him the invisible has become visible. Both Old and New Testaments make it plain that “no one has ever seen God.” The Fourth Evangelist, however, adds that “the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has made him known” (John 1:18).⁵⁴

O’Brien proceeds to indicate that the use of *image* in Colossians 1:15 is a title of majesty, emphasizing “Christ’s relation to God.”⁵⁵ F. F. Bruce agrees with O’Brien’s assessment of the significance of Paul’s usage of *image* in verse 15: “To say that Christ is the image of God is to say that in him the nature and being of God have been perfectly revealed—that in him the invisible has become visible.”⁵⁶ The true image of God in visible form is the person of Jesus Christ.

⁵²James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 87–88.

⁵³Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians*, Anchor Bible (New Haven, CT: Yale Press, 1995), 195.

⁵⁴Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 43.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 44.

⁵⁶F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 57–58.

The second phrase to be considered is “firstborn over all creation.” The significance of the phrase has been noted by commentators, as O’Brien states, “If ‘image’ (εἰκῶν) emphasizes Christ’s relation to God, then the second title, ‘firstborn of all creation’ . . . designates his relationship to the creation.”⁵⁷ The word πρωτότοκος is a combination of the Greek words πρῶτος and τίκτω. The word πρῶτος can mean “first” or it can be translated “most.” In 1 Timothy 1:15, πρῶτος is translated “chief” when the apostle Paul calls himself the chief among sinners. Paul is not arguing he is the first to have ever sinned. In a similar fashion, the Old Testament speaks of the firstborn in the context of “greatest” as in Psalm 89:27. Bruce cautions against interpreting this phrase to mean that Christ is the first of all beings to be created, as, “he is the one by whom the whole creation came into being.”⁵⁸ In agreement with both Bruce and O’Brien, William Hendriksen says of this phrase that Christ is “the One to whom belongs the right and dignity of the Firstborn in relation to every creature. . . . He is prior to, distinct from, and highly exalted above every creature.”⁵⁹ Christ has a unique relationship with God the Father.

This is an important passage of Scripture as related to the person and work of Christ. E. K. Simpson comments, “This is one of the great Christological passages of the NT, declaring as it does our Lord’s divine essence, pre-existence, and creative agency.”⁶⁰ The significance of this passage is seen in the fact that humanity only has power as given by God; it is not inherent within mankind’s creation, and by Christ “all things hold together.” All that humanity is belongs to God, and it is all for the glory of God. Although Scripture makes this abundantly clear time and again, humanity, in their desire

⁵⁷O’Brien, *Colossians-Philemon*, 44.

⁵⁸Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 59.

⁵⁹William Hendricksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 72.

⁶⁰E. K. Simpson and F. F. Bruce, *Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1957), 192.

to wrestle the throne of God away from its Creator, consistently and continually resists the idea of being ruled over. For the Christian educator, the importance of pointing students to the person and work of Christ, who is the exact image of God, becomes an essential priority in the formation of students.

Human Nature through the Metanarrative of Scripture

The person and work of Christ ultimately defines the image of God. For the Christian educator, Christ defines and determines what spiritual formation looks like in the life of the believer as Christ is the image of God (Col 1:15; Heb 1:3), and it is into his image that Christians are to be transformed (Rom 12:1-2). To further understand the implications of the image of God for the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution, a brief overview of the image of God within the metanarrative of Scripture is beneficial to see the context and progression of understanding of the need for the restoration of the image of God within the life of the individual.⁶¹ This metanarrative is seen through four distinct stages: (1) the original state, (2) the perverted state, (3) the redeemed/renewed state, and (4) the perfected state.⁶²

Creation: The original image. The creation of mankind is recorded in Genesis 1:26-27. In this original state, Adam and Eve would have been sinless, yet the ability to sin was present.⁶³ However, within this original state, prior to the fall, Adam and Eve would have “functioned sinlessly and obediently in all three of the relationships . . . in worshiping and serving God, in loving and serving each other, and in ruling over

⁶¹Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 82.

⁶²Estep, Anthony, and Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education*, 187–88; Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 82–96.

⁶³Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 82.

and caring for that area of creation where God had placed them.”⁶⁴ In the original created state, the creation in the image of God allowed humanity to function in the God-given capacity as a son of God, and as a ruler over God’s creation.⁶⁵ In the original state, these relationships would have been unaffected by sin.

Fall: The perverted image. Genesis 3 records the fall of mankind into sin, and as a result of this fall, the relationships that are a result of the image of God are drastically affected. In his fallen state, mankind worships idols instead of God,⁶⁶ mankind exploits each other (84), and mankind abuses the earth for “his own selfish purposes” (85). Hoekema comments, “Having forgotten that he was given dominion over the earth in order to glorify God and to benefit his fellowship, man now exercises this dominion in sinful ways” (85). However, the image of God was not lost in the fall, as both Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9 speak about the image of God remaining within humanity after the fall. Although the image of God was, as John Calvin describes, “deformed, vitiated, mutilated, maimed, disease-ridden, and disfigured” (83), the image remains.

Redemption: The renewed image. Having been perverted by the fall, the image of God is in need of renewal. Since the image is not lost in the fall, the image does not need to be replaced, but rather redeemed. This redemption results in mankind being able to worship God, enter into relationships with others in a selfless manner, and properly care for God’s creation (87-88). The goal of this redemption is conformity into the image of Christ. Hoekema explains, “Because Christ is the perfect image of God, becoming more like God also means becoming more like Christ” (89).

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 192.

⁶⁶Commenting on modern-day idols, Hoekema states, “Whereas primitive man made idols out of wood and stone, modern man, seeking something to worship, makes idols of a more subtle type: himself, human society, the state, money, fame, possessions, or pleasure. All such idolatries are perversions of man’s capacity for worshiping God.” Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 84.

The renewal of the image of God through the redemptive work of Christ involves both the aspects of regeneration and sanctification (86), and although the redemption of individuals is possible because of the work of God, the process of being renewed into the image of Christ is an ongoing process (91). Hoekema cautions, “We must never forget that while they are in this present life believers are *genuinely* new but not yet *totally* new. They are incomplete new persons” (91). As such, even those who have been redeemed have an ongoing need for spiritual formation within their lives, as the image of Christ is being manifest. This formation is one of the primary tasks of graduate-level ministerial training, and, in turn, is a necessary component of effective ministry.

Restoration: The perfected image. The complete renewal of the image of God “will be the culmination of God’s plan for his redeemed people” (91). However, more than restoring mankind to a state of unconfirmed innocence like that in the garden prior to the fall, the perfected image extends beyond the limitations of mankind’s pre-fallen state (92). In this perfected state humanity’s relationships will be perfected, as humanity worships God (93), experiences “perfect fellowship in a perfect society” (93), and reigns “perfectly over all creation, with and under Christ” (94). In this future state, humanity will enjoy perfect harmony with God, with others, and with God’s creation.

Implications of metanarrative for ministerial training. Having considered human nature through the metanarrative of Scripture, it is important to consider the implications for online graduate-level ministerial training. Ministerial training is designed to not only assist the student in one’s own spiritual development, but also in the spiritual development of those the student will be ministering to in the future. As such, graduate-level ministerial training necessitates the formation of the student, and also the ability of the student to lead others (laity within the church) to be formed spiritually. Considering the biblical view of human nature within the metanarrative of Scripture, ministerial

training is itself primarily concerned with the formation of ministerial students into the renewed state within the metanarrative, which is transformation into the image of Christ. In turn, these students will be ministering to others within the context of either the perverted state (fallen) or the renewed state (redemption). As such, the role of the faculty member moves beyond being a guide for students to being a model of spiritual formation for students to follow; the objectives of the classroom move beyond student learning to student formation into the image of Christ, and the purpose of the institution moves beyond pragmatic efficiency of courses and programs to the ministerial effectiveness of the student.

Implications of Biblical View of Human Nature for Graduate-Level Ministerial Training

Considering the renewed state of individuals within graduate-level ministerial training, transformation into the image of Christ becomes a high priority. This biblical understanding of human nature provides a foundation upon which the best practices of online graduate-level ministerial training can be presented so that the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution are focused more effectively on the formation of students as ministers of the gospel.

As way of review, the image of God is the condition in which mankind was created. Although many understandings of the image of God have been suggested through scholarship, for the purposes of this project, the image of God is considered in light of its Ancient Near-Eastern context. As a result of that consideration, the image of God relates to humanity's position under God (son-ship) and humanity's position over creation (ruler-ship). Son-ship and ruler-ship have implications for an individual's relationship toward God, toward others, and toward nature. However, the nature of these relationships is affected depending on one's standing within the metanarrative of Scripture—creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. For the purposes of considering the implications for online graduate-level ministerial training, students are assumed to be

within the redemptive state, since they are preparing for a vocation as ministers of the gospel.⁶⁷

The Role of the Faculty: A Model to Follow

The implications of the image of God for the Christian educator are seen when considering the role of the faculty member within online graduate-level ministerial training. Considering the need for spiritual formation within the lives of the students, the role of the faculty member moves beyond a “sage on the stage,” or even “a guide on the side,”⁶⁸ as the role of the faculty member concerns more than the transferring of information. The role of the faculty member is a formative role within the life of the student,⁶⁹ and consequently, the faculty member should be seen as a model to follow. Ultimately, the goal of this formation of the student is formation into the image of Christ, as is evidenced through a study of the image of God throughout the metanarrative of Scripture. In addition, as has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, the image of God relates to humanity’s ability to have relationships with each other and with God. As such, it is important that these relationships are focused on formation into the image of Christ. Within Scripture, the need for a model to follow is evidenced within the work and ministry of the apostle Paul as he established relationships with churches and taught church leaders and Christians during his ministry.

Paul explicitly challenges his readers to imitate his example in six passages in

⁶⁷This is not to say that all M.Div. students have been regenerated, but rather, for the purposes of this current research project, the implications for the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution will be considered in light of students within the redeemed state.

⁶⁸Martha Burkle and Martha Cleveland-Innes, “Defining the Role Adjustment Profile of Learners and Instructors Online,” *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks* 17, no. 1 (n.d.): 76, accessed November 6, 2014, <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1011383.pdf>; Richard S. Ascough, “Designing for Online Distance Education: Putting Pedagogy before Technology,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 5, no. 1 (2002): 21, doi:10.1111/1467-9647.00114.

⁶⁹James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 19, 24, 26.

Scripture (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Gal 4:12; Phil 3:17; 4:9; 2 Thess 3:7-9), and in many more passages Paul offers himself as an example, although not overtly stating to imitate his pattern (see Rom 15:1-3; 1 Cor 8:13). Hawthorne, Martin, and Reid note that there

are relatively few passages in the Pauline corpus where Paul uses the language of imitation . . . (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2:14; 2 Thess. 3:6, 9). The idea of imitation, however, plays a significant . . . though sometimes misunderstood, role in Paul's ethics.⁷⁰

Considering the importance of Paul's example of leadership, Don Howell describes Paul as a servant leader and lists six portrayals of Paul: (1) authoritative, (2) exhortational, (3) accountable, (4) affirmatory, (5) sacrificial, and (6) missional.⁷¹ Within each of these six areas, Howell discusses various aspects of Paul's ministry and the way in which Paul lives out each area. Significant to this discussion is the interaction between Howell's third and fifth observations. Throughout his writings, Paul's "pattern to imitate"⁷² corresponds to Paul's "sacrificial" life,⁷³ especially in the areas Howell identifies as Paul's *humble assessment*, Paul's *strength in weakness*, and Paul as a *suffering servant*.⁷⁴ As the apostle Paul provides himself as a model for others to follow, he acknowledges his dependency on Christ, and his position in Christ as a "fellow servant to imitate."⁷⁵ Paul is concerned both with his relationship to God and his relationship to other believers, and offered himself as a model for others to follow.

Paul's statements concerning the need for others to follow him as he follows Christ are written within diverse contexts and can serve as an example for faculty in

⁷⁰Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 428.

⁷¹Don Howell, *Servants of the Servant: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 256–86.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 265–66.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 277–82.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 266.

graduate-level ministerial training. For instance, 1 Corinthians 4:16 is written within the context of a response to a prideful attitude within some of the church members at Corinth (4:6, 18, 19), Galatians 4:12 is written in the context of legalism, and 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9 is written within the context of dealing with undisciplined living. These indications reveal that this challenge of imitation is not limited to one particular context of spiritual formation, or one particular context of ministerial training. The need for formation into the image of Christ is applicable to all ministry areas, and reflects mankind's desire to have a right relationship to God and to others.

The nature of this imitation is important to understanding Paul's view of his role of training leaders for the church. As Hawthorne, Martin, and Reid suggest, the imitation mentioned by Paul is not a reference to a mirror image of Paul, nor is it arrogance on Paul's part.⁷⁶ The "notion of imitating some sort of moral exemplar was quite common in the ancient world."⁷⁷ And although there are aspects of the desire and ability to have dominion inherent within humanity's creation in the image of God, Paul's motivation was not driven by pride or self-promotion. Paul's challenge to imitate his leadership is unique that Paul is not the focus. David Garland explains,

This appeal was a common literary and hortatory motif in antiquity . . . but it takes a different twist in light of the divine command "Be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26; cf. Matt. 5:48) and Paul's assertion that he follows the example of Christ. He is to be followed only insofar as he adheres to the divine standard set forth by Christ.⁷⁸

Paul viewed himself as an example for others to follow as he followed Christ, and Paul's desire was for others to be formed into the image of Christ.

Central to Paul's challenge to imitate his leadership is the understanding that following Paul's example is not the same as Jesus saying "follow Me." As is clear from

⁷⁶Hawthorne, Martin, and Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 430.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 502.

the study of the person and work of Jesus early in the chapter, Jesus has the rightful place of supremacy within creation, and, due the image of God, humanity is a vice-regent under Christ's ultimate dominion. Consequently, Paul is saying to imitate his example, as Paul follows Christ. Whereas Jesus' statement was without condition (simply, "Follow Me"), Paul's statement was to imitate his example. Howell writes,

Strictly speaking, Paul does not call on the churches to 'follow' his leadership, for Christ alone is their leader, whereas he is a servant commissioned to enhance their allegiance to Christ. Paul sets forth himself not as a leader to follow, but as a fellow servant to imitate.⁷⁹

Paul understands his position in Christ, and his need to model formation for others. In a similar way, the role of the faculty member is to point students to the person and work of Christ, and to further the student's formation into the image of Christ, so that students will have a proper relationship to God, to others, and to God's creation. Learning is not the goal of ministerial training; rather, formation is the goal, and the faculty members must view their role as models of spiritual formation for students to follow.

The example of the apostle Paul is an important consideration for the role of the faculty, as the faculty member should have a similar mindset concerning one's role within online graduate-level ministerial training. Similar to the apostle Paul, the role of a faculty member within graduate-level ministerial training is to strengthen the relationship to the church and to build church leaders to be effective ministers of the gospel, for the ultimate glory of God. The apostle Paul understood his role as forming his followers into the image of Christ, and as evidenced by Paul's statements, Paul used himself as an example to imitate. The role of the faculty member within the life of the student should be a similar role, which is to be a model for students to follow, so that the students are formed into the image of Christ, which will lead to a right relationship to God, to others, and to God's creation.

Additional implications of the faculty member being a model to follow are

⁷⁹Howell, *Servants of the Servant*, 266.

explored in greater detail in chapter 5 of this research project, where specific application to the online setting are explored. However, research on the apostle Paul’s correspondence with churches from a distance evidences the ability of the apostle Paul to encourage spiritual formation within the lives of church members and leaders by the relationship that he fostered with others. Christopher Jackson, writing on the concept of social presence within Paul’s epistolary correspondence, notes that the apostle Paul utilized correspondence from a distance (i.e. letters) to reinforce his physical presence with various churches.⁸⁰ One method utilized by Paul was “to increase social presence by fostering intimacy, feelings of closeness to him by his audience.”⁸¹ In addition, Paul communicated “immediacy” or “cues of accessibility”⁸² to his audience, which assisted in the development of a relationship with his audience. Within online graduate-level ministerial training, faculty have the ability to foster relationships with students by utilizing many of the technological and pedagogical advances available within the context of online pedagogy.⁸³ These relationships enable the faculty member to serve as a model of spiritual formation for students to follow, which ultimately brings glory to God.

The Objectives of the Classroom: Formation-Centered Learning

As the faculty member considers one’s work as a model to follow, the way in which the course is taught will be greatly affected. Within online graduate-level ministerial training, the ultimate objectives of the course will move beyond simply learner-centered,

⁸⁰Christopher Dwight Jackson, “The Phenomenon of Social Presence in the Pauline Epistles and Its Implications for Practices of Online Education” (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 59–62.

⁸¹Ibid., 64.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³The implications of the need for the faculty member to be a model to follow will be further explored within chap. 5 of this research project. Within chap. 5, practical suggestions for institutions will be presented and explained.

or learning-centered objectives,⁸⁴ to formation-centered objectives. Lois LeBar states, “If we’re looking for transformation of life, we’ll teach for transformation, we’ll pray for transformation, and we’ll not cease our efforts until we see transformation.”⁸⁵ The purpose of the M.Div. degree is theological in nature, as ATS explains; the M.Div. degree is designed “to prepare persons for ordained ministry and for general pastoral and religious leadership responsibilities in congregations and other settings.”⁸⁶ The apostle Paul provides a model of spiritual formation within his writings, which builds off of the challenge to his followers to follow his example as he follows Christ. Formation of individuals into the image of Christ is a driving focus of the apostle Paul’s interaction with those individuals, and is a means for Paul to ultimately glorify God.

One example of the importance of formation, and a modeling of formation, is provided by Paul within the text of Philippians 2, which is a theological reflection on the importance of Christ stepping into the metanarrative of Scripture in order to bring about the redemption of humanity. It is within this chapter that Paul models the humility of Christ. Philippians 2 provides insight into the inner-life of Paul, as Christ’s humility is displayed, and Paul’s imitation of Christ is also recognized. Hans Conzelmann builds this connection between Paul’s challenge to his followers and Paul’s modeling of his leadership in his comments on 1 Corinthians 11:1: “The imitation of *Christ* takes its bearings not on the person of the historical Jesus, not on his way of life, but—in the sense of Phil 2:6ff—on his saving work.”⁸⁷ Richard Hays agrees that the focus of Christ was

⁸⁴Thomas Esselman, “The Pedagogy of the Online Wisdom Community: Forming Church Ministers in a Digital Age,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 7, no. 3 (2004): 163, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9647.2004.00206.x; Arthur W. Bangert, “The Seven Principles of Good Practice: A Framework for Evaluating On-Line Teaching,” *Internet and Higher Education* 7, no. 3 (2004): 220, 226.

⁸⁵Lois E. Lebar, *Education that Is Christian* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2000), 96.

⁸⁶Association of Theological Schools, “Educational and Degree Program Standards,” G–39.

⁸⁷Hans Conzelmann, *First Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. George W., S. J. MacRae, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1975), 180.

salvific in nature: “For Paul, such imitation means one thing only: shaping our lives in accordance with the pattern of Jesus’ self-sacrificing love. The imitation of Christ is therefore focused on the cross.”⁸⁸ Christ, as the ultimate image of God, demonstrates perfected son-ship and ruler-ship by his life and ministry. Concerning the objectives of the classroom within online graduate-level ministerial training, spiritual formation within the life of the individual is evidenced in a life that focuses on Christ and Christ’s work on the cross, all for the glory of God.

In Philippians 2, Paul offers four examples of humility to the church at Philippi by reminding the church of various individuals with a relationship to the church. Starting first with Christ (vv. 5-11), then proceeding to himself (v. 17), then Timothy (vv. 19-24), and finally Epaphroditus (vv. 25-30), Paul illustrates the way in which humility can be modeled in the life of the believers at Philippi.⁸⁹ The ultimate example is the person of Christ, as Philippians 2:3-8 states,

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The theme of humility is prevalent within the passage, and the word itself literally means “‘lowliness of mind’ which agrees to treat and think of others preferentially.”⁹⁰ Gordon Fee notes the very idea of humility “stands in utter contradiction to the values of the Greco-Roman world, who generally considered humility not a virtue,

⁸⁸Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 181.

⁸⁹Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 152.

⁹⁰Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 110.

but a shortcoming.”⁹¹ As Fee explains, true humility “has to do with a proper estimation of oneself, the stance of the creature before the Creator, utterly dependent and trusting.”⁹² Although not the only indication of spiritual formation within the life of the Christian, humility is an essential element of the spiritual formation of the individual, and demonstrates the individual’s dependence on God for one’s very existence. Forrest and Lamport explain spiritual formation:

Spiritual formation, we contend, is the process of coming to grips with our finite humanness and developing an understanding that our sufficiency lies in the person of Christ. This definition represents the ‘transformed mind’ that Paul describes in Romans 12. The result of this type of transformation is an understanding that our position and sufficiency are wholly and completely dependent upon Christ and what he has completed for us in his death and resurrection.⁹³

This understanding of one’s position before Christ, and one’s reliance on Christ, is evidenced in a life of humility. Humility, which Gordon Fee defines as “proper estimation of oneself,”⁹⁴ was modeled by Christ throughout the incarnation, and was also modeled by the apostle Paul throughout his ministry, and has an affect on the individual’s relationship to God, to others, and to God’s creation. Within the context of online graduate-level ministerial training, spiritual formation must be priority, and humility is offered as an indication that formation is taking place within the life of the individual; however, humility does not imply weakness, as Christ’s supremacy over creation is still evidenced throughout the incarnation.

Forrest and Lamport draw implications for spiritual formation from a distance from a study of Paul’s correspondence with the church at Rome.⁹⁵ Among the

⁹¹Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 188.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Forrest and Lamport, “Modeling Spiritual Formation,” 111.

⁹⁴Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 188.

⁹⁵Forrest and Lamport, “Modeling Spiritual Formation.”

implications proposed by Forrest and Lamport are the centrality of the gospel in spiritual formation, and the foundation of the scripture as an authority for spiritual formation within the lives of individuals.⁹⁶ In addition, Forrest and Lamport note the importance of both dialogue and the sense of community for bringing about spiritual formation within the lives of others,⁹⁷ as such, relationships are vital to effective spiritual formation. Also, the authors speak to the importance of prayer and accountability between Paul and his audience.⁹⁸ Considering these implications, it is evidenced that spiritual formation is possible from a distance; however, factors must exist that help to determine the formation of others, which include the importance of a biblical grounding, the centrality of the gospel, and interaction that is focused on support and accountability of each other, and lead to right relationships to God, to others, and to God's creation. For educators within the field of online graduate-level ministerial training, these implications from the example of Paul provide a foundation from which to utilize the technological and pedagogical advances available.⁹⁹ Considering Paul's example, and the example of humility provided by Christ, the focus of the online classroom within online graduate-level ministerial training should ultimately be on the formation of students into the image of Christ. In preparing students for full-time vocational ministry, the most important aspect of that educational experience should be a focus on the formation of that individual into the image of Christ, which will ultimately glorify God.

The Purpose of the Institution: Ministerial Effectiveness

Having considered the role of the faculty member and the objectives of the

⁹⁶Ibid., 116–17.

⁹⁷Ibid., 117–18.

⁹⁸Ibid., 118–19.

⁹⁹Specific applications based on these advances will be considered in chapter 5.

classroom, attention is now directed to the purpose of the institution. An institution's decision to provide online courses and degree programs is at times based on pragmatic considerations¹⁰⁰ without sufficient attention to theological foundations.¹⁰¹ In elevating pragmatic considerations, institutions may give preference to pedagogy, andragogy, and technology instead of Scripture and theology,¹⁰² and although humanity's creation in the image of God includes a desire to have dominion over God's creation as a vice-regent, ministerial training is uniquely theological in nature and should be considered in light of the formation of the student into the image of Christ for the purpose of preparing individuals to be vocational ministers of the gospel. The very purpose of the institution offering ministerial training programs should be to prepare ministers, not pragmatic efficiencies, and ultimately ministerial effectiveness should be defined and viewed as obedience to Christ, and the glorification of God. Within this context, the concept of *ministerial effectiveness* is not determined by aspects of ministry such as the size of the congregation, the number of programs offered at the church, the size of the church

¹⁰⁰Robert W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction in Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008); Shauna E. Tonkin, "The Christian Ethos and E-Learning," *Christian Scholar's Review* 33, no. 4 (2004): 557. In his essay on online education, Ascough notes the importance of "putting pedagogy before technology," yet fails to address the importance of putting theology before both pedagogy and technology. Ascough, "Designing for Online Distance Education," 17-29.

¹⁰¹See case study 4 in article written by Russell Haight. This section of the article speaks of the deep theological roots of online education, specifically dealing with the Trinitarian understanding of body, soul, and spirit. In addition, the article interacts with Kelsey's 2002 article and the idea of humans being "spiritual machines" or "complex organic bodies." Steve Delamarter et al., "Technology, Pedagogy, and Transformation in Theological Education: Five Case Studies," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 10, no. 2 (2007): 64, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9647.2007.00319.x; Stephen and Mary Lowe present a more holistic model for online education in their article, Lowe and Lowe, "Spiritual Formation"; The idea of community in education is linked to Scripture, including Paul's "koinonia community," which Lowe explains is not only related to physical presence. Stephen D. Lowe, "Building Community and Facilitating Formation in Seminary Distance Education," *Christian Perspectives in Education* 4, no. 1 (2010): 1-33.

¹⁰²Chapter 4 of this research will provide a critique of the following text, which at places within the resource, evidences deficiencies in the articulation of a theological foundation for online education. Mark A. Maddix, Mary E. Lowe, and James R. Estep, eds., *Best Practices of Online Education* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age, 2012).

budget, or the salary of the pastor; rather, ministerial effectiveness is ultimately concerned with obedience to Christ through one's ministry. As students are being formed into the image of Christ through the objectives of the classroom, and as students interact with faculty members who serve as models of Christian formation, the institution should seek to make decisions that lead to the furthering of the students' obedience to Christ in all areas of the student's life. This posture of obedience has already been considered as the picture of the humility of Christ in Philippians 2. Gordon Fee explains humility as a "proper estimation of oneself."¹⁰³ With Fee's description in view, attention is directed to the way the apostle Paul viewed himself, and his position as a son of God, and a vice-regent with God over God's creation. As a model for others to follow in their formation into the image of Christ, attention will be given to two aspects of Paul's ministry: his testimony and his view of his position in Christ.

Paul's testimony of Christ. Several passages of Scripture provide Paul's testimony. Acts 9 recounts his actual conversion, which is repeated by Paul in Acts 22, Acts 26, Galatians 1, and Philippians 3. Much of Paul's other writings speak of his life after the initial point of salvation. Two of the more prominent passages providing an overview of his life after conversion are found in Philippians 3:1-11 and 2 Corinthians 11:16-33.

In 1 Corinthians 15:9, Paul calls himself the least of the apostles, and yet in 2 Corinthians 11, he admits to severe beatings with lashes and rods (vv. 24-25), to being shipwrecked (v. 25), and even needing to escape Damascus by being lowered in a basket through a window (v. 33). In 2 Corinthians 12, he speaks of a "thorn in the flesh" to "keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations" (v. 7). Although Paul speaks of his redemption throughout his writings, Paul is quick to boast of his weaknesses, and he remains "content with weaknesses, insults, hardships,

¹⁰³Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 188.

persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10). It is evident from his testimony that Paul is not attempting to build himself up; rather, his focus is on “Christ crucified” (1 Cor 1:23), and ultimately sees his ministry as something to glorify God. Paul uses his testimony to point others to Christ, not to build himself up, or for self-promotion.

Paul viewed his effectiveness in ministry not in the number of churches he planted nor in the number of converts he had from a message he preached; rather, Paul viewed ministerial effectiveness as obedience to Christ, no matter what the cost. When forced to boast, Paul boasts “in the Lord” (1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10: 17). In addition, Paul highlights his humble status in order to magnify Christ and emphasize his position as a son of God. Paul states in Philippians 3:7-11,

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

In humility, Paul considered the testimony of what God did through his life as a picture of ministerial effectiveness. For educators in online graduate-level ministerial training, the overall purpose of the program and courses is a vitally important consideration. Paul’s testimony is a picture of ongoing formation into the image of Christ, and Paul used his testimony as an example of a right relationship to Christ for others as a picture of spiritual formation within one’s life. To become more like Christ within his own life, and to assist others in doing the same, was Paul’s driving focus, and likewise should be the driving purpose of online graduate-level ministerial training. Ministerial effectiveness should have as an objective the testimony of the changed life (a life renewed into the image of Christ), and as such, ministerial effectiveness will relate to an individual’s relationship to God, to others, and to God’s creation, and will ultimately bring glory to God.

Paul's position in Christ. Having considered Paul's presentation of his testimony throughout his epistles, attention is now focused on another reoccurring theme throughout Paul's writing: the image of slavery. In Paul's own writings, the acknowledgment of being freed from sin is quickly followed by acknowledgment of his position in Christ as a slave of righteousness. Romans 6:18 captures this thought, noting, "And, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness." Murray Harris suggests,

Among New Testament authors it is Paul in particular who uses slave imagery to depict the believer's relation to God or Christ. For him the Christian may be simply and aptly described as someone who serves the Lord as a slave or someone who is the Lord's slave.¹⁰⁴

Paul consistently uses the imagery of slavery to identify his position in Christ, and views this position as evidence of being formed into the image of Christ. However, Paul's use of the image of slavery does not take away from his acknowledgment of mankind's uniqueness among God's creation, or mankind's ability to have dominion as a vice-regent over God's creation. Properly understood, Paul's image of slavery speaks to mankind's son-ship (relationship to God) and ruler-ship (relationship to others).

Reflecting on Paul's use of the imagery of slavery, Ben Witherington explains that Paul "turns the tables on the strong by calling for them to imitate him in his slavish behavior, which turns conventional rules and expectations upside down."¹⁰⁵ Witherington's comments are made in the context of 1 Corinthians 8-10. Specifically considering chapter 9, it becomes apparent that Paul desires to emphasize his lowly status:

For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant [slave] to all, that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win

¹⁰⁴Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 154.

¹⁰⁵Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 229.

the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.

Paul considers his ministerial effectiveness to be directly tied to his position in Christ, and all of his training is for the “sake of the gospel,” which will bring glory to God.

The Greek word for slave in 1 Corinthians 9:19 means “to make a slave.” Paul uses this idea of himself throughout many of his books, noting his position as a slave of Christ. Paul also uses this word to describe Christ in Philippians 2:7. When believers understand their relationship to God, they demonstrate humility by ceasing to strive to be the Lord of their own lives. John MacArthur explains, “We no longer live for ourselves.”¹⁰⁶ The apostle Paul models this understanding throughout his ministry, and seeks to help others model this understanding as well as to interact with God, with others, and with God’s creation. Within graduate-level ministerial training, the purpose of the institution should be to focus on the formation of students into effective ministers of the gospel, which will be evidenced by the individual’s testimony as being redeemed, and as being a slave to righteousness (Rom 6).

Paul understands that his ministry is really not his ministry at all; it is the ministry of Jesus Christ through Paul, for the glory of God. Harris suggests, “Freedom from slavery is followed by freedom in slavery.”¹⁰⁷ Craig Blomberg summarizes both Paul’s testimony and Paul’s challenge to his followers to imitate his leadership:

It is as if Paul is saying, “Do you want to know what it means to live a consistent Christian life, properly balancing freedom and restraint? Then watch me, follow me, and live with me. I may not be perfect, but I try to imitate the selfless life Christ lived, and to the extent that I succeed, you should do the same.”¹⁰⁸

It is this desire of Paul to testify to the person and work of Christ that becomes a model

¹⁰⁶John MacArthur, *Slave: The Hidden Truth about Your Identity in Christ* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 200–9. MacArthur notes four paradoxes related to the believer’s position as a slave of Christ: (1) slavery brings freedom, (2) slavery ends prejudice, (3) slavery magnifies grace, and (4) slavery pictures salvation.

¹⁰⁷Harris, *Slave of Christ*, 154.

¹⁰⁸Craig L. Blomberg, *First Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 205.

for others to follow, and becomes an example of what spiritual formation looks like within the life of the individual. Modeling Christ becomes the focus of the Christian life, which affects the way in which a minister views oneself, and the way in which the minister views those being ministered to through their ministry. Consequently, one's relationships to God, to others, and to God's creation are all affected. Within online graduate-level ministerial training, the ultimate purpose of the institution should be focused on preparing individuals to be effective ministers of the gospel, by demonstrating the redemption of Christ within one's life, and by demonstrating the posture of humility through the acknowledgement of one's slavery to Christ.

Modeling Christ

Within the context of online graduate-level ministerial training, faculty and students find themselves in an interesting situation. On the one hand, faculty lead students with a primary focus on the spiritual formation of students into the image of Christ. On the other hand, students are being prepared to lead others within the context of the local church, which means students are being prepared to be leaders of others. As such, it is important to consider what this leadership looks like specific to spiritual formation, for the faculty member (who is a model to follow), the student (who is being formed into the image of Christ), and also for the individuals who will be ministered to by the students.

Paul's statements about humility and modeling Christ are written within the context of Paul leading others, and Paul utilizes his position in Christ to help him be a more effective leader of God's people. Implications of Paul's example for the purpose of graduate-level ministerial training are numerous, as M.Div. programs are designed to train graduates for ministerial effectiveness. In the following section, four specific areas are mentioned and explained, all of which help to ensure the role of the faculty member is a model to follow, the objectives of the classroom are focused on the spiritual formation of students, and the overall purpose of the institution is focused on the ministerial effectiveness of the student. Formation into the image of Christ should lead faculty and

students to demonstrate Christ-like characteristics, which includes being a person of character, demonstrating a willingness to suffer, exhibiting strength with humility, and leading through serving.

A Person of Character

First, formation into the image of Christ means the individual is a person of character. Don Howell speaks to the character of a leader by listing three important components of the servant leader—character, motive, and agenda. Although it is acknowledged that “character is not essential to leadership,”¹⁰⁹ as there are many examples of leaders without Christ-like character throughout history who could gather and organize others, it should also be noted that “character is what makes a leader worth following.”¹¹⁰ Howell explains,

Who the leader is and is becoming in one’s essential being (character), why the leader undertakes a course of action (motive), and what the leader pursues as the defined mission (agenda) are, we believe, the core constituents and interrelated foci of the kind of leadership enjoined in Holy Scripture.¹¹¹

The character of the faculty member is of vital importance to both the institution and to the students who sit under his teachings. Just as the image of God affects all aspects of humanity and points to humanity’s uniqueness among God’s creation, the character of the individual is something that permeates all of the individual’s life. Faculty who model character within their own lives will be more prepared to help form students who also model character.

Willingness to Suffering

A second consideration concerning formation into the image of Christ is the

¹⁰⁹Andy Stanley, *Next Generation Leader: 5 Essentials for Those Who Will Shape the Future* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2006), 131.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Howell, *Servants of the Servant*, 296.

willingness of the individual to suffer for the sake of Christ. The context of the discussion in Philippians 2 is the last paragraph of Philippians 1 (vv. 27-30), which speaks to the suffering (29) endured by the Christians at Philippi. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1, Fee writes,

For Paul it is a question of love and freedom. . . . Knowledge and rights lead to pride; they are ultimately non-Christian because the bottom line is selfishness—freedom to do as I please when I please. Love and freedom lead to edification; they are ultimately Christian because the bottom line is the benefit of someone else—that they may be saved (v. 33).¹¹²

The mindset of humility should be evidenced in one's understanding of the role of suffering. Although Christ is the "image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15), and has ultimate dominion over all of creation (Col 1:16), Hebrews 5:8 explains that Christ, "learned obedience through what he suffered." Likewise, the apostle Paul provides an example for others to follow not only in what he suffered, but also in his response to that suffering. Through Paul's use of the imagery of slave, it should be evident that the Christian life is a life of "living sacrifice" (Rom 12:1) to God. This willingness to suffer is modeled by Christ and by the apostle Paul, and provides educators within graduate-level ministerial training the perspective necessary to effectively train students to be effective ministers of the gospel.

Strength with Humility

A third consideration concerning formation into the image of Christ relates to the humility of the individual. The humility demonstrated by the apostle Paul has already been considered; however, Paul's posture of humility does not indicate weakness. Reflecting on the ministry of the apostle Paul, Howell states, "Paul is not afraid to directly confront individuals or groups of individuals who seek to undermine the

¹¹²Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 477–78.

apostolic foundation of the churches,”¹¹³ which speaks to Paul’s relationship with the individuals within the churches. In commenting on the context of 1 Corinthians 4:14-21, Don Carson notes, “And where deviations from the way of the cross are sufficiently notorious, that leader may have to resort to some form of discipline.”¹¹⁴ The apostle Paul even states in 2 Corinthians 12:2, “For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” It is a posture of strength with humility that is consistently modeled by the apostle Paul throughout his ministry and affects Paul’s relationship to God, to others, and to God’s creation.

Howell also comments on the manner in which Paul carried out his ministry:

Though Paul is an authoritative leader, he is not authoritarian, demanding compliance to satisfy a psychological need to lord it over others. He is respectful, gracious and non-coercive, never controlling, manipulative or threatening. Paul is deeply conscious that the apostolic delegated to him is for building up the churches, never for tearing them down (2 Cor 10:8; 13:10).¹¹⁵

This attitude can only be displayed when the leader is in a right relationship with Christ, and when the leader understands the significance of the model set for followers. The apostle Paul understood this principle and challenges believers today to model his leadership, not so he would be exalted, but “so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:20-11). He challenges his followers to model his leadership, as long as he is following Christ, and he provides many opportunities for his followers to see his leadership in action. Most notably, Paul follows the modeling of Christ by humbly obeying the commands of Jesus so that Jesus may be glorified, and the gospel message may be proclaimed. In a similar way, educators

¹¹³Howell, *Servants of the Servant*, 257.

¹¹⁴D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), loc. 1250, Kindle.

¹¹⁵Howell, *Servants of the Servant*, 260.

within the setting of online graduate-level ministerial training can model strength with humility for students, and they can educate students to model strength with humility throughout the student's ministry.

Leading through Serving

Finally, formation into the image of Christ means that the faculty member and the student will lead others through serving others. Peter Northouse explains the concept of servant leadership as a paradox that requires the leader to consider the follower first.¹¹⁶ Northouse also notes servant leadership emphasizes the belief that leaders should be altruistic and humanist, using the leader's position to empower and enable others.¹¹⁷ This attitude of a servant leader is evidenced within the life and ministry of the apostle Paul, and can serve as a model for faculty and students. This paradox is also seen in the example of Christ as ruler over all of creation, and also the humble servant of God (Phil 2). Paul's willingness to "become all things to all men" (1 Cor 9) for the sake of the gospel is an example of this servant mind-set. In addition, Paul's continued use of the imagery of slavery to describe his own life is further evidence of Paul's view of servant leadership.

Among the most influential theorists on servant leadership is Robert Greenleaf, who explains, "The great leader is seen as servant first."¹¹⁸ Larry Spears continued Greenleaf's work and identified ten characteristics as central to servant leaders: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of people, and building community.¹¹⁹ However, more than just a

¹¹⁶Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 6th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013), 219.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 233.

¹¹⁸Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, ed. Larry C. Spears, 25th anniversary ed. (New York: Paulist, 2002), 21.

¹¹⁹Larry Spears, "The Understanding and Practice of Servant-Leadership," School of Leadership Studies: Regent University, August 2005, 3–4, accessed January 21, 2015,

set of characteristics, servant leadership is a philosophy and set of behaviors.¹²⁰ For the faculty member, servant leadership through one's courses and interaction with students must become a way of life, as the image of God affects all areas of life, and affects relationships to God, to others, and to God's creation. Timothy Laniak explains that "biblically speaking, a human leader is none other than God leading his own people through an anointed servant."¹²¹ The faculty member must keep the formation of students into the image of Christ a priority within online graduate-level ministerial training and seek to model this formation within their own lives so that God will ultimately be glorified.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on articulating biblical truth as it applies to online graduate-level ministerial training. Historical considerations and implications of the doctrine of the image of God were articulated and considered in light of the implications for providing a foundation for online graduate-level ministerial training. The image of God as seen through the metanarrative of Scripture was addressed, which demonstrated that after the fall of humankind into sin there is a need for the renewal of the image of God through the redemptive work of Christ. This renewal of the image of God is spoken of within the New Testament as formation into the image of Christ, who is presented within the Scriptures as being the exact image of God. Considering the need for the renewed image to be formed within individuals, the chapter presented implications of a biblical view of human nature for graduate-level ministerial training in the areas of the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution.

https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/sl_proceedings/2005/spears_practice.pdf.

¹²⁰Northouse, *Leadership*, 236.

¹²¹Timothy Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 92.

Using the apostle Paul as an example, it was demonstrated that the role of the faculty member should be that of a model for students to follow, the objectives of the classroom should be focused on the formation of students, and the purpose of the institution should be on ministerial effectiveness. Finally, four characteristics of individuals who model formation into the image of Christ were presented, which included being an individual of character, being willing to suffer for the cause of Christ, having strength with humility within one's leadership, and leading others through serving others. All of these characteristics help demonstrate that formation into the image of Christ is being achieved within the life of the individual, which helps to provide a foundation for online graduate-level ministerial training. Table 2 presents the implications of theological anthropology for online pedagogy in graduation-level ministerial training as related to the role of the faculty member, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution.

Table 2. Implications of theological anthropology for online pedagogy in graduate-level ministerial training

Biblical/Theological Foundation		Implications
<p>Mankind is created in the Image of God - son-ship (relationship to God) - ruler-ship (relationship to others)</p> <p>Mankind represents God to others and to God's creation</p> <p>Mankind's creation in the Image of God is ultimately a statement about God</p> <p>Jesus Christ is the true Image of God</p>	<p>Mankind is to be conformed into Christ's Image (Rom 8:29)</p> <p>Apostle Paul uses himself as a model of spiritual formation for others to follow (1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:17)</p>	<p>Role of the Faculty Member: A Model to Follow</p>
	<p>Christ models spiritual formation through obedience to Heavenly Father and humility (Phil 2)</p> <p>Spiritual formation is a transformed mind (Rom 12:1, 2)</p>	<p>Objectives of the Classroom: Formation-centered</p>
	<p>Apostle Paul views ministerial effectiveness as obedience to Christ (Phil 3:7-11)</p> <p>Apostle Paul considered himself a slave of Christ (Rom 6; 1 Cor 9)</p>	<p>Purpose of the Institution: Ministerial Effectiveness</p>

CHAPTER 4
REINTERPRETING EXISTING THEOLOGICAL
FOUNDATIONS FOR ONLINE
THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Chapter 3 of this dissertation focused on David Powlison’s first epistemological priority—articulating biblical truth—as it applies to online graduate-level ministerial training. It was argued in chapter 3 that the implications of a biblical understanding of the image of God are that the role of the faculty member moves beyond being a guide for students to being a model of spiritual formation for students to follow, the objectives of the classroom move beyond learning centered objectives to formation centered objectives, and the purpose of the institution moves beyond pragmatic efficiency for courses and programs to the ministerial effectiveness of the student. Chapter 4 of this dissertation focuses on David Powlison’s second epistemological priority—critiquing, debunking, and reinterpreting alternative models—as it relates to online graduate-level ministerial training. *Best Practices of Online Education: A Guide for Christian Higher Education*¹ is utilized as the primary focus of the critique, as it is one of the only resources available designed to provide a comprehensive approach to the integration of theology, technology, and online pedagogy. Although the editors of the resource being critiqued do not put forth a specific unified model for online theological education, the best practices of the resource provide implications for online theological training. As such, the implications of the best practices for online graduate-level ministerial training will be critiqued as opposed to a specific model.

The uniqueness of the resource is explained in the preface to the resource:

¹Mark A. Maddix, Mary E. Lowe, and James R. Estep, eds., *Best Practices of Online Education* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age, 2012).

The book is unique because it approaches online education from a Christian perspective. This means the book is designed to facilitate discussion and dialogue among Christian educators about the challenges and opportunities of offering online classes and programs in a Christian context. The book also addresses the opportunities that Christian universities and seminaries have in offering online courses and programs.²

In addition, the resource is designed to be a guide for best practices of online Christian education, as the editors explain,

This book addresses the challenges teachers and administrators face in offering online courses and programs in Christian higher education. The book is designed to assist Christian teachers and administrators to understand how to generate and facilitate effective learning in online education. We have titled this book *Best Practices of Online Education: A Guide for Christian Higher Education* because it combines the best research and practices in the field of online education with a theological framework for understanding online learning.³

This chapter considers deficiencies within the resource that result from the lack of articulation of a theological foundation, particularly related to the practice of the integration of faith and learning and specifically regarding the primacy of Scripture. Throughout the chapter it is argued that three primary weaknesses that result from these deficiencies are a reduction in the role of the faculty to a facilitator of learning, a reduction in the objectives of the classroom to the transferring of information, and a reduction in the purpose of the institution to pragmatic efficiency.⁴

Deficiencies in Articulation of Theological Foundation

In the following section, deficiencies in the articulation of a theological foundation within *Best Practices of Online Education: A Guide for Christian Higher Education* are presented, particularly related to the practice of the integration of faith and learning and specifically in regard to the primacy of Scripture. It is argued throughout the section that a theological framework is either not articulated, or assumed, throughout the

²Ibid., x.

³Ibid.

⁴Chapter 5 of this research project will consider practical points of application that assist the faculty member concerning the role of the faculty, objectives of the classroom, and purpose of the institution.

resource. Consequently, where a theological framework is provided in some chapters of the resource, that framework is not utilized comprehensively throughout other chapters of the resource. In addition, deficiencies in the practice of the integration of faith and learning will be presented, particularly related to the primacy of Scripture concerning the intersection of theology, technology, and pedagogy.

Lack of Articulation of Theological Framework

The *Best Practices of Online Education* resource is designed to combine “the best research and practices in the field of online education with a theological framework for understanding online learning.”⁵ Although the editors of the book claim to provide a theological framework for online education,⁶ as will be demonstrated in the following section, little is provided in way of a comprehensive theological framework. Throughout the resource there are aspects of theology, such as the acknowledgement of the Triune God,⁷ the recognition of God’s working in the lives of students,⁸ the formative nature of education,⁹ the need for whole person development,¹⁰ the use of images to convey

⁵Maddix, Estep, and Lowe, *Best Practices of Online Education*, x.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Mark Heinemann and James Estep, Jr., “Educational Theory and Online Education,” in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 9.

⁸Stephen Lowe, “Adult Learning Theory and Online Learning,” in *Best Practices of Online Educatio*, 23.

⁹Mark Maddix, “Developing Online Learning Communities,” in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 33.

¹⁰Mary Lowe, “Spiritual Formation as Whole-Person Development in Online Education,” in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 58.

Christian messages,¹¹ the need to tie online education to the mission of the institution,¹² humanity's creation in the image of God,¹³ and the need to integrate faith and learning.¹⁴ Nevertheless, a theological framework is not articulated, assumed, or not comprehensively applied throughout the book.

The assumption of a theological framework. An example of a theological framework being assumed within the resource is seen in chapter 9, "Characteristics of Successful Online Students."¹⁵ Written by Jason Baker, the chapter starts with a reference to students being "fellow image-bearers of God" (101); however, the only mention of anything theological is in the context of explaining the need for online students to become comfortable writing prayers in a discussion forum (104). The chapter concludes with an appeal to "treat others with grace and love" because all are created in the image of God (106), but no further clarification or explanation is provided in the chapter. While the author of this chapter likely has a Christian audience in mind, his statements reduce the implications of the image of God to a moralism of kindness, and the ambiguity of the claims leave the reader to make assumptions about how humanity's creation in the image of God affects the role of the online student.

Even in the section where Baker addresses the skills and characteristics that "successful online learners share" (106), there is no articulation of the spiritual components

¹¹Jay Akkerman, "Visualize More: Effective Online Teaching Methods," in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 92.

¹²David Phillips, "Developing Online Programs," in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 148.

¹³Maddix, Estep, and Lowe, *Best Practices of Online Education*, xiii; Lowe, "Adult Learning Theory and Online Learning," 28; James Estep, Jr., and Steven Yates, "Challenges and Opportunities for Online Theological Education," in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 72; Jason Baker, "Characteristics of Successful Online Students," in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 101, 106.

¹⁴Christine Bauer and Mary Jones, "Online Course Design Considerations," in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 168.

¹⁵Baker, "Characteristics of Successful Online Students," 101–6.

of humanity, instead, Baker’s list includes characteristics such as technological literacy, reading skills, writing, time management, willingness to ask for help, and a healthy level of autonomy (103-5). Although the preface to the book presents chapter 9 as addressing “the theological foundations of students as image bearers of God,”¹⁶ no theological framework is articulated or comprehensively incorporated within the chapter; instead, the chapter focuses on the technological and pedagogical characteristics of online students.

Lack of comprehensive implementation of framework. An articulation of a theological foundation for online education is provided in chapter 5 of the resource, which speaks to the spiritual formation of students. Written by Mary Lowe, chapter 5 focuses on “Spiritual Formation as Whole-Person Development in Online Education;”¹⁷ however, the chapter stands alone, and does not provide a comprehensive framework throughout the book.

In the chapter, Lowe explains the difficulty in defining the term, *spiritual formation*, and offers “an ecosystem model of growth and development,” which provides a more comprehensive view of spiritual formation (56). This ecosystem approach to spiritual formation emphasizes the community and interconnectedness of the student’s experience, and stresses the importance of students and institutions embracing an understanding of being part of the body of Christ. As part of this interrelated system of the body of Christ, Lowe advocates that institutions seek to help students carry out the biblical commands concerning the *one-anothers* (57).

Lowe also stresses the ecosystem’s approach to spiritual formation by stressing that spiritual development “cannot be done apart from interaction with others” (58). In addition, Lowe explains the importance of “whole person development that mirrors the fullness of Christ” (58). At the end of the chapter, Lowe provides research that indicates

¹⁶Maddix, Estep, and Lowe, *Best Practices of Online Education*, xii.

¹⁷Lowe, “Spiritual Formation,” 55–63.

“the classroom experience ranks third in comparison to the more dominant influence of the church and its leadership” (59). In addition, the author provides statements about the inherent makeup of humanity: “At the core of human existence lies the need for connection with others. Although God created individual beings with unique particularities, people were not created to be and remain in isolation from others” (60). This need for relationship, according to Lowe, is best addressed by an ecosystems approach to online education.

Lowe’s chapter on spiritual development is one of the stronger chapters in the resource as it relates to the articulation of a theological foundation for best practices of online Christian education. The chapter presents best practices for spiritual development (ecosystems approach), the definition of spiritual development as being comprehensive in nature, and the nature of humanity as existing in community. However, although the chapter provides explanations behind the ecosystems approach, Lowe does not provide details as to why spiritual development is an essential aspect of ministerial training. In addition, and more important to this current discussion, the framework that is provided by Lowe is not incorporated throughout the rest of the resource. For institutions engaged in online graduate-level ministerial training, the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution should all be focused on the formation of students into the image of Christ—a concept that is deeply theological, and one that incorporates all of the individual’s life. In order for the formation of students to permeate the entire institution, the primacy of Scripture must be a value throughout the entire university.

A result of the lack of a comprehensive implementation of a theological framework is seen in implications such as the role of the online faculty member. Although this consideration will be further explored later in this dissertation, one example is

evidenced in chapter 11, which focuses on developing faculty.¹⁸ Similar to the deficiencies evidenced in the presentation of the role of the online student in chapter 9 (previously presented), the presentation of the role of faculty development focuses on technological and pedagogical techniques and practices, with little attention to spiritual or theological competency or development. There is no mention in the chapter of ongoing spiritual formation of the faculty member, or the impact on the faculty member's spiritual development upon students. With a lack of a comprehensive implementation of a theological framework for online graduate-level ministerial training, the educator is left with an understanding of *what* to teach, and *how* to teach, but there is no foundation provided as to *why* to teach.

The Primacy of Scripture

The lack of an articulation of a theological framework throughout the resource is further magnified when considering the view of the integration of faith and learning throughout the resource, particularly related to the primacy of Scripture concerning the intersection of theology, technology, and pedagogy. Throughout this dissertation, David Powlison's three epistemological priorities are utilized as a model to examine existing foundations for online theological education, and for constructing a theological framework for online graduate-level ministerial training. Powlison's priorities provide a starting place of Scripture for the pursuit of the assimilation of both Scripture and social science.¹⁹ As Powlison explains, "Scripture is sufficient, not in that it is exhaustive, containing all knowledge, but in that it rightly aligns a coherent and comprehensive system of counseling that is radically at odds with every a-theistic model."²⁰ As

¹⁸Dale Hale, "Online Faculty Development," in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 122, 126.

¹⁹David Powlison, "Questions at the Crossroads: The Care of Souls and the Modern Psychotherapies," in *Care for the Soul*, ed. Mark R. McMinn and Timothy R. Phillips (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001).

²⁰*Ibid.*, 32–33.

demonstrated in the following section, throughout the *Best Practices of Online Education* resource, the primacy of Scripture is not always given a place of primacy in the discussion of the intersection of theology, technology, and pedagogy.

Mark Heinemann and James Estep author the first chapter of the resource, which is designed to introduce the “theory and practice” of online education by considering the technological revolution, various educational presuppositions, and select learning theories.²¹ In addition, the chapter is designed to present “developments and processes at work in effective online instruction” (3-4). Ultimately, the chapter is designed to provide an “overview” of online education, which is intended to serve as a “guidebook” (4) and foundation for the rest of the resource.

Although the preface to the resource indicates the first chapter “combines the best research and practices in the field of online education with a theological framework for understanding online learning,”²² the introduction to this first chapter of the resource contains no mention of a theological or biblical foundation for online education. The first reference to anything Christian or theological is found under the section “Presuppositions about Online Education,”²³ where the authors note,

First, it is assumed that we approach this subject from a Christian point of view. . . . For now let us say that our faith perspective should profoundly impact what, how, and why we do *any form* or teaching and learning. Christian education remains Christian by its theological orientation and assumptions not by the methods of delivery. (4-5)

However, after this point in the chapter, no further explanation or articulation of “a Christian point of view” is provided; instead, the focus of much of the resource is on the methods of delivery and pedagogical elements unique to online education.

After overviewing learning theories in general, and two distance education

²¹Heinemann and Estep, “Educational Theory,” 3.

²²Maddix, Estep, and Lowe, *Best Practices of Online Education*, x.

²³Heinemann and Estep, “Educational Theory,” 4–6.

theories in particular, the authors list what they call the “essentials of effective online learning” (9). Included within the essentials are the following eight areas: Triune God, aims, content, learner, teacher, environment, methods, and evaluation (9-14). The list of essentials of effective online teaching starts with the recognition of the Triune God, and the authors acknowledge, “For the Christian educator, God radically changes the teaching-learning process” (9). In addition, the authors suggest, “A helpful exercise would be to go through each of the categories in this list and ask: How does the working of the Triune God affect this part of the teaching-learning process” (9)? Heinemann and Estep’s suggestion of this exercise acknowledges the need to process through the theological foundation undergirding the online educational process, and they summarize some of these theological foundations.²⁴ However, Heinemann and Estep fail to conduct the very exercise they suggest, and consequentially, there is a void of the articulation of the theological foundation or framework. Instead, the need for a theological framework is noted, but not articulated within the chapter, and the primacy of Scripture is not evidenced.

For example, after listing the “Triune God” as the first essential of “effective online learning,”²⁵ the second essential element relates to the “aims” of online education, yet there is no mention of anything theological in the section on the aims. The aims mentioned relate to the desire of the student to gain a new technological skill, or the desire of the student to apply one’s learning (9), but nothing of the spiritual formation of the student into the image of Christ. The third essential element mentioned by the authors relates to the “content” of the online course, yet there is no mention of the working of the

²⁴The quote within the chapter from P. G. Downs is, “First, we must understand that *unredeemed people cannot understand spiritual truth . . . [which] is understood by means of the Holy Spirit. . . . Second, there must be supernatural intervention in our ministry for lives to be touched. . . . When we recognize that unless God is at work our effort is in vain, then we grasp the essential place of prayer. . . . Third, Christian education is a partnership between God and the educator. . . . Christian educators are responsible to teach well and to pray well.” Ibid, 54-55, emphasis original.*

²⁵Heinemann and Estep, “Educational Theory,” 9.

Triune God; rather, the authors note that the content of the online course is communal (9), and that the content is personal in the aspect that students are “encouraged to process through the materials for themselves” with the assistance of the faculty member (10). Essential element 4 relates to the online learner, and stresses adult learning theory, without any mention of theological considerations (10). Essential element 5 relates to the role of the teacher, and stresses the faculty member as a “guide on the side” of the student (10-11). And the sixth essential element focuses on the learning environment, and stresses the importance of building community among the students (11-12), with no mention of any theological significance of community.

It is not until essential element 7 (methods) where the authors note, “Online interaction in a Christian context has additional aspects that are not in the research literature” (13). Heinemann and Estep then list what they call the “seven-fold interaction” within online Christian education (13-14). These relationships include “God-instructor,” “God-student,” and “God-content” (14). However, besides mentioning these relationships, there is no articulation of how these relationships affect online methods of instruction, leaving the impression that the authors could omit those few sentences which speak to Christian or theological aspects and include this chapter in any book on online educational theory irrespective of theological considerations.²⁶ Although Scripture is addressed, the primacy of Scripture is not stressed throughout the chapter, which is a pattern that is followed throughout much of the resource.

Stephen Lowe writes the second chapter of the book, entitled, “Adult Learning Theory and Online Education.”²⁷ The chapter starts with a brief overview of the forms of

²⁶For instance, the last sentence of the chapter notes, “For Christian educators, this requires dependence on the Holy Spirit and hard work organizing the various components of the teaching-learning process to the best advantage of the virtual student.” *Ibid.*, 15. The need for reliance on the Holy Spirit is acknowledged, but not explained in any meaningful way. The need for a theological foundation is assumed within the chapter, and not adequately articulated. *Ibid.*

²⁷Lowe, “Adult Learning Theory,” 17–30.

distance education, which notes that distance education can be traced to the apostle Paul's correspondence with Christians throughout his epistles (17). In addition, the introduction to the chapter explains that historically there has been a "religious motivation" for offering distance education.²⁸ Lowe also suggests that adult learning theory has not been effectively incorporated into online course design, and provides four possible reasons for the lack of implementation of adult learning theory (18).

Lowe provides an overview of the definitions of adulthood within American society and notes the difficulty associated with defining adulthood; however, the "psychological dimensions" within the individual are stressed, which include "the awareness of being self-directed and interdependent" (19). The author explains that the apostle Paul speaks to the difference between pedagogy and andragogy when writing Galatians where Paul uses the Greek word for "tutor," from which the word *pedagogy* is derived (19). This section ends with the purpose of the chapter:

This chapter will advocate for the necessity of studying adult education theories, principles, and practices for the express purpose of being more fully informed and aware of how best to design and structure online Christian education learning experiences for adult learners. (20)

As such, throughout the chapter there is a heavy reliance on adult learning theory for a foundation of education, and not Scripture.

The andragogical considerations and research of Malcolm Knowles is reviewed by Lowe, which leads to Lowe's presentation of Merriam's "five andragogical assumptions," which "positively influence the design and practice of online Christian education" (22). The first assumption is that an adult learner "has an independent self-concept and . . . can direct his or her own learning" (22). For online Christian education, Lowe suggests providing an introductory course, designed to orient the individual to

²⁸The author quotes C. H. Grattan, noting, "There is no possibility of understanding adult education historically without a clear comprehension of the religious motivation for its promotion." *Ibid.*, 17.

“learning online for adults.”²⁹ Assumption 2 is that the adult learning “has accumulated a reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource for learning” (22). In explaining this assumption, Lowe notes the importance of Christian students and educators reflecting on the way in which God has worked within one’s life, and the preparation God has done within the life of the student. In addition, Lowe lists possible sources of knowledge from secular literature, which include science, tradition, and conviction. To this list, Lowe adds *revelation*, which he explains is a significant influence within the life of the Christian (23).

The three remaining assumptions indicate that the adult learner “has learning needs closely related to changing social roles,” the adult learner is “problem-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge,” and the adult learner is “motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors” (22). Concerning the application of these three assumptions to online Christian education, Lowe does little more than to suggest these principles should be applied to the ministerial context of students. For instance, assumption 3 about changing social roles could be applied to the context of the local church (24), or assumption 4, which speaks to the application of knowledge, could be applied to ministry within a church context (24-25). Assumption 5 speaks to the internal motivation of the adult learner, however, there is no mention of the theological or biblical motivation behind the Christian learner, and no mention of a regenerated life with new desires and purpose that indicate the individual has been formed into the image of Christ (25).

Lowe ends the chapter with an appeal to what he calls “situated social ecologies” (28). Utilizing the work of Bronfenbrenner and other educational theorists, he notes the importance of the student’s context while learning (26-27). The importance of Christian online education is explained, as the author recognizes the “specific familial and church contexts that instructors need to integrate into online learning experiences” (27). Lowe

²⁹Although a good suggestion for a best practice of andragogy, there is nothing uniquely Christian or theological about this suggestion; rather, an introductory course would be beneficial to Christian or secular online learning environments. *Ibid.*, 23.

explains,

If we are going to move online Christian education to the next level of development and impact, then we must embrace the situated, contextualized, and ecological reality of life and learning in order to maximize our learning capacity and our potential for greater transformation into the image of God. (28)

This is a helpful reminder from Lowe; however, although there is a recognition of the need for this situated social ecology, there is no further articulation of the theological significance of this formation into the image of Christ, instead, theological foundations are assumed rather than expressed. Moreover, although Scripture is addressed within the chapter, noting the example of the apostle Paul, the primary focus of the chapter centers on andragogical principles and not the Scripture. For instance, formation of students into the image of Christ (although mentioned within the chapter) is not a prevalent theme throughout the chapter. The emphasis of the chapter is on the theoretical aspects of adult learning theory, which leads to theological observations; however, starting with the theoretical leads to a pedagogy that is theoretically driven and not necessarily theologically driven.

These deficiencies in the articulation of a theological foundation within the resource, particularly related to the practice of the integration of faith and learning, and specifically regarding the primacy of Scripture, lead to weaknesses in the approach to online graduate-level ministerial training. Three primary weaknesses that result from these deficiencies are a reduction in the role of the faculty as a guide who assists in the facilitation of learning, a reduction in the objectives of the classroom to the transferring of information through learning-centered objectives, and a reduction in the purpose of the institution to pragmatic efficiency.

Three Primary Weaknesses

The deficiencies in the articulation of a theological foundation, particularly related to the practice of the integration of faith and learning and specifically regarding the primacy of Scripture, have been presented. In the next section, it is argued that three

primary weaknesses that result from these deficiencies are a reduction in the role of the faculty as a guide who assists in the facilitation of learning, a reduction in the objectives of the classroom to the transferring of information through learning-centered objectives, and a reduction in the purpose of the institution to pragmatic efficiency. These weaknesses demonstrate that there is a need for a theological framework for online graduate-level ministerial training, so that the best practices of online graduate-level ministerial training can be presented in such a way that the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution are focused more effectively on the formation of students into the image of Christ as ministers of the gospel.

Role of the Faculty Member

Chapter 3 of this dissertation considered the implications of the doctrine of the image of God on understanding the role of the faculty member within online graduate-level ministerial training. Using the apostle Paul as an example within chapter 3, it was argued that the role of the faculty member should be viewed as a model for students to follow. The apostle Paul understood his role as forming his followers into the image of Christ, and as evidenced by Paul's statements to follow his example as he follows Christ (1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:17), Paul used himself as an example to follow. The role of the faculty member within the life of the student should be a similar role, which is to be a model for students to follow, so that the students are formed into the image of Christ.

Although the role of the faculty member within online graduate-level ministerial training should be a model to follow, the emphasis throughout the *Best Practices of Online Education* resource concerning the role of the faculty member is an individual who has "content expertise, online teaching and learning experience, and an instructional design background."³⁰ In addition, it is stressed in the resource that the faculty member should be an individual who understands the medium of online

³⁰Bauer and Jones, "Online Course Design Considerations," 163.

education, as is explained within the resource: “The issue is the delivery mechanism, how the course materials are delivered to the student and how that student engages and integrates with the subject.”³¹ Within the medium of online, the faculty member is encouraged to function as a facilitator of learning, instead of an “expert dispenser of content.”³² The actual facilitation of the course requires that the instructor note the differences between online and residential courses,³³ and ultimately necessitates the role of the faculty member shifting from “being the sage on the stage, to being the guide on the side.”³⁴ The faculty member is encouraged to not just consider the delivery of content within the online learning environment; rather, the faculty member is encouraged to establish a connection with students, and guide the student through the course content.³⁵ All of these considerations are important to understanding the role of the faculty member within the online environment; however, the recognition of the faculty member as a model for students to follow is virtually absent from the pedagogical considerations. The absence of spiritual formation within the life of the faculty member and the life of the student is seen in three specific areas: online faculty development, the role of the faculty member as a guide on the side of students, and the need for incorporating social presence within the online classroom.

Online faculty development. Dale Hale speaks to the importance of online faculty development in chapter 11 of the resource (121-28), and argues that to “succeed in the online environment, it takes a complete change of perspective” (122). Hale

³¹Hale, “Online Faculty Development,” 122.

³²Stephen Kemp, “Social Presence in Online Learning,” in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 45.

³³C. Damon Osborne, “Best Practices in Online Teaching,” in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 85.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵Hale, “Online Faculty Development,” 122.

explains that faculty need to develop into online teachers who do not simply rely on teaching the way they have always been taught (124); faculty who have historically taught in residential courses who desire to teach online will need to view the role of the faculty member differently within the online medium. As is demonstrated by this focus, the chapter considers *how* a faculty member should teach an online course, but does not provide the foundation as to *why* the faculty member should teach. Consequently, the focus of the chapter is on understanding and utilizing the medium of online education, and not the necessity of the formation of the faculty member and students.

For example, Hale argues that the online faculty member must “develop into an online teacher” (122). As part of this development, he stresses that faculty should be in “a constant state of learning” (125), and that this ongoing training is an awareness of increasing technological advances (125), and “remaining engaged in the teaching methodology” (126). Ultimately, Hale summarizes his thesis by stating, “Since students have access to such a vast array of information, it becomes important for faculty to know how to guide and lead their students to the best and most correct information.” The aspect stressed within the need for faculty development is an understanding on the part of the faculty member of the medium of online learning.

Hale’s emphasis on the passing on of information is seen in his statement that “online teaching is less about the teaching than it is about the learning” (124). Clearly learning is important for all levels of education, including the medium of online education; however, ultimately learning is not the goal of online graduate-level ministerial training. As has already been argued in this dissertation, formation into the image of Christ should be the motivating factor within online graduate-level ministerial training,³⁶ of which learning information is an essential component. Throughout the *Best Practices of Online*

³⁶James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 19, 24, 26.

Education resource, the emphasis of developing faculty relates almost entirely to technological and pedagogical techniques and practices.³⁷ Consequently, the educator within the context of online graduate-level ministerial training is left with an understanding of *what* to teach, and *how* to teach, but there is little offered in way of a foundation as to *why* to teach.

A guide on the side. C. Damon Osborne explains in chapter 7 the best practices in online teaching,³⁸ and provides “guidelines to developing effective learning in an online environment” (81). These guidelines emphasize the importance of online faculty approaching the online course differently than they would approach a traditional face-to-face course (emphasizing the medium of online pedagogy), and are provided in five areas, including preparation of the course, social presence in the course, effectively facilitating the course, the boundaries between work and home, and effectively ending the course (81). What is stressed within the writing is the need for the faculty member to understand the medium of online learning, and not the importance of being a model of spiritual formation for students to follow.

For example, Osborne explains that when preparing the course, the teacher is to develop material that is “comprehensive, concise, clear, and connected” (82). This connectedness needs to include connections to the course material and to other students in the course (83). The social presence within the course can be established by the effective use of various *tools* and *techniques* within the online classroom. For instance, the use of discussion boards is stressed throughout this section, and become a way for faculty to interact with students (84). The actual facilitation of the course requires that the instructor note the differences between online and residential courses, which includes a change in mindset from “being the sage on the stage, to being the guide on the side” (85).

³⁷Hale, “Online Faculty Development,” 122, 126.

³⁸Osborne, “Best Practices in Online Teaching,” 81–90.

The author encourages online instructors to establish and maintain boundaries by keeping a schedule for managing an online course (87), similar to the office hours held by a professor teaching residential courses. Finally, Osborne explains that instructors should bring closure to the course in an intentional manner, which helps to establish the end of the course (88). However, throughout the presentation of how to prepare the course, there is little to no theological foundation provided for the role of the faculty member, instead, technological and pedagogical considerations are provided as a foundation for developing best practices of online pedagogy, and not the formation of the student into the image of Christ.

Ultimately, Osbourne argues, “The key to good teaching will always remain the same by engaging students in the process of learning and the pursuit of greater knowledge” (88). The emphasis of Osbourne’s philosophy of education indicates that the role of the faculty member is ultimately the facilitation of learning. For faculty members involved with online graduate-level ministerial training, the facilitation of learning is a necessary part of ministerial training; however, ultimately the role of the faculty member moves beyond a facilitator of learning (88) to a model that students can follow. This emphasis on faculty being a model for students to follow is a result of a theological framework for education that views formation of students as the ultimate goal of education; especially education within the context of online graduate-level ministerial training.

Incorporating social presence. Stephen Kemp also writes about implementing best practices within the online classroom in chapter 4 of the resource, which focuses on the aspect of social presence.³⁹ Kemp states, “This chapter focuses on the research and practice on how *distance* can be broken down in online learning and how *presence* can be supported and optimized in online and real life social contexts” (41). Kemp explains within his historical considerations that the conversation of

³⁹Kemp, “Social Presence in Online Learning,” 41–53.

compatibility between traditional residential instruction and distance instruction shifted in focus from the comparability of *content delivery* to comparability of *social presence*, which Kemp links to the formation of the student by indicating that “in many cases, the faculty member as a facilitator of learning is emphasized more than as an expert dispenser of content” (45). Kemp stresses the need for a mentoring relationship between the faculty member and the students, even through online instruction, which can be accomplished by adjusting the role of the faculty member within the learning environment (45).

Within this context of student formation, Kemp presents research indicating that the most formative relationships for students are often community and familiar relationships. Within this section, Kemp mentions the importance of social presence for Christian educators: “For Christian educators, social presence is not just a means to an academic end, but a foundational component on Christian education itself” (46). Kemp then proceeds to present a brief overview of the research of educators such as Stephen Lowe, Mary Lowe, and Jeff Reed, who have written on various aspects of social presence (46-47). As encouraging as it is for Kemp to recognize the need for a mentoring relationship between faculty and students, throughout his section on the best practices for social presence within online courses, Kemp offers little to distinguish Christian education from secular education. He mentions “church” or “prayer” occasionally throughout the section, but does not elaborate on the theological importance of these aspects (47-51). Under the heading of “Next Practices,” Kemp notes, “Tools such as Lowe’s ‘one another’ assessment or BILD International’s ‘becoming established’ assessment can be used powerfully to enhance social presence according to biblical standards” (50). However, throughout the chapter, Kemp does not explain these “biblical standards” or the theological significance of social presence within an educational setting, and he fails to demonstrate how the assessment tools mentioned enhance according to biblical standards. The theological foundations of social presence are assumed and lack articulation throughout

the chapter. Furthermore, the role of the faculty member is still heavily focused on the facilitation of learning, and not necessarily stressed as being a model of spiritual formation for students to follow.

The role of the faculty member. In summary, throughout the resource, the picture presented of the role of the faculty member is primarily about the content delivered and the facilitation of learning. The online faculty member is presented as an individual who has competency in an academic discipline, and competency in the medium of online learning. The need for faculty to model spiritual formation is either assumed or overlooked entirely. The centrality and priority of spiritual formation of the faculty member and the student is not the foundation stressed within the resource, and consequently, formation of students into the image of Christ is not consistently stressed throughout the resource. Instead, the role of the faculty member as an individual who can effectively bring about the facilitation of learning within an online environment is consistently stressed throughout the resource, and not a faculty member who can be a model for students to follow.

Objectives of the Classroom

Chapter 3 of this dissertation considered the implications of the doctrine of the image of God on understanding the objectives of the classroom within online graduate-level ministerial training. It was argued that within online graduate-level ministerial training, the ultimate objectives of the classroom should move beyond learner-centered or learning-centered objectives, to formation-centered objectives. Using the apostle Paul as an example in Philippians 2, and specifically the example of humility provided by Christ, it was argued in chapter 3 of this dissertation that the focus of the online classroom within online graduate-level ministerial training should ultimately be on the formation of students into the image of Christ.

In the following section, it is argued that the emphasis of the objectives of the

classroom throughout the *Best Practices of Online Education* resource is on the transferring of information, and ultimately on the learning of the student. Although student learning is important for online graduate-level ministerial training, the formation of students into the image of Christ must be the primary objective of the classroom. Throughout the resource, the emphasis on learning is seen in the areas of establishing learning communities, and in the implementation of learning-centered objectives within the online classroom.

Establishing learning communities. The creation of learning communities is stressed throughout the *Best Practices of Online Education* resource. The reason behind the creation of these communities is diverse, with suggestions including the need to retain students, for Christian formation,⁴⁰ to “discuss and exchange ideas,”⁴¹ for “learning to happen,”⁴² and for “fostering learning, growth, and community among students and the teacher.”⁴³ Mark Maddix contributes to the discussion on online communities in two separate chapters in the resource (chaps. 3 and 10), and explains that the first importance of online communities is a measure to retain students. Secondly, Maddix explains the importance of online communities as a formative role in the lives of students.⁴⁴ In chapter 3 of the resource, Maddix indicates the motivating factor of establishing learning communities should be Christian formation, and an opportunity for a professor to model effective communication to students;⁴⁵ however, the principles and best practices presented within the chapter are not consistently linked to the formation of students into

⁴⁰Maddix, “Developing Online Learning Communities,” 33.

⁴¹Mark Maddix, “Generating and Facilitating Effective Online Discussion,” in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 107.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., 108.

⁴⁴Maddix, “Developing Online Learning Communities,” 33.

⁴⁵Ibid., 39.

the image of Christ. Instead, these principles are linked to the learning of students.⁴⁶

For example, in chapter 3, Maddix provides a list of factors that enhance online learning communities, which includes transactional distance, social presence, social equality, small group activities, group facilitation, teaching style and stage of learning, and size of community.⁴⁷ Although these factors are important for learning communities, these factors are provided without any interaction with the theological or biblical foundation. There is no mention by the author about the work of formation into the image of Christ, which leads to a greater sense of community between the faculty and the students. Instead, Maddix stresses the need for learning communities for “enhancing student satisfaction and commitment.”⁴⁸ The impact of which is to reverse “feelings of isolation through interaction with the professor and other students, which should result in overall student satisfaction and educational success.”⁴⁹ The author fails to tie the need for community to humanity’s creation in the image of God, and also fails to articulate the need for formation into the image of Christ as an implication of strong learning communities. To conclude the chapter, Maddix offers four best practices for online learning communities, but does not link the best practices to a biblical or theological foundation.⁵⁰ Maddix does mention the aspect of “formation” as a result of the best practices, but does not explain what type of formation he is advocating for, and also stresses the students having a “meaningful learning experience” as a result of the learning

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., 35–36.

⁴⁸Ibid., 36.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰The four best practices provided by Maddix are (1) “Develop clear guidelines for online discussion,” (2) “Develop supportive learning environments,” (3) “Online presence and faculty involvement,” (4) “Create learning activities that foster interaction and dialogue.” Ibid., 36–38.

community.⁵¹

In chapter 10 of the resource, Maddix notes that online discussion is an important component to online courses due to the need for “effective learning and formation,”⁵² and presents class discussion as the heart of online courses (116). In the chapter, Maddix addresses questions related to the role of the teacher, the level of interaction necessary for online courses, and the student’s role in discussion (108), which is based in large part on the research of educationalists Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson (111-12). Maddix notes that Chickering and Gamson’s seven principles of good practice are utilized by much of the research base, and although these principles were originally designed for undergraduate education, they “are applicable to all forms or post-secondary education” (111), even calling the seven principles a “theoretical framework to evaluate effective online learning” (111). Although the seven principles speak to the need for communication and community between the faculty and students, and between the students, Maddix does not recognize the theological framework behind humanity’s need for relationships. The reader is left with a theoretical framework, and not a theological framework for the implementation of effective discussion online.

This theoretical framework is further emphasized within the chapter with a list of best practices for online education, which are described as a “summary of the best practices from the literature and personal experience in generating and facilitating online discussion” (112). These practices include the need to “develop clear guidelines and expectations for discussion” (112), “develop discussion rubrics that evaluate cognitive, social, and teaching presence” (113), and “create forums for informal and relational connections with students” (115). As is demonstrated in the best practices, the lack of the articulation of a theological framework reduces the role of the online faculty member to a

⁵¹Ibid., 38.

⁵²Maddix, “Generating and Facilitating Effective Online Discussion,” 108.

“facilitator of online discussion” (117), who must be clear with expectation for students throughout the online discussions. In addition, the teacher is to “model effective communication” (117) within the course, but there is no mention of modeling the image of Christ, or assisting in the formation of students into the image of Christ. The role of the faculty member is reduced to a facilitator of learning, and the role of discussions within the classroom is reduced to creating an environment where “students and faculty experience the dynamic power and energy on online learning” (117). Without a clearly articulated theological framework built on the biblical view of humanity’s creation in the image of God, the course objectives are reduced to the learning of the student and not the formation of the student into the image of Christ.

Learning-centered objectives. The elevation of learning-centered objectives is also demonstrated within the last two chapters of the resource (chaps. 16 and 17). Christine Bauer and Mary Jones author chapter 16 of the resource, which speaks to the need for faculty developing online courses to ideally have “content expertise, online teaching and learning experience, and an instructional design background.”⁵³ Missing from the description is the theological competency of the faculty member, which would enable the faculty member to be a model to follow, and would enable the faculty member to develop an online course where the formation of the student into the image of Christ is stressed within the course. Instead, the faculty member has technological and pedagogical competencies, but not theological competencies.

The authors stress that the learning outcomes of the online course must be consistent with the residential course, but that the content must be re-engineered (163-64). This re-engineering includes five considerations for the course design: analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation (165). The need for *analysis* considers the nature of the student, the characteristics of the faculty member, and the

⁵³Bauer and Jones, “Online Course Design Considerations,” 163.

nature of the course. The characteristics of the faculty member that are considered by the authors relate to the faculty member's beliefs about learning, attitude about students and the subject matter, expertise in the academic discipline, and technological competency (166). There is no mention of theological competency within the section of analysis. The authors note the second consideration, which is *design*, is necessary to ensure "tight alignment between the learning outcomes or objectives, activities, and assessments" (167). In addition, Bauer and Jones note the importance of the integration of faith with online course design for Christian institutions, which they suggest follow a "threefold strategy for integrating faith online, including course content, the student-to-student community, and student-to-faculty relationships" (168). Items to consider for the integration of faith and learning include devotionals, prayer requests, and sharing testimonials (168), but do not mention the aspect of formation of students into the image of Christ as an objective of the course. Instead, effective "student instruction" (170) is stressed as the objective of online course design.

The third consideration is the actual *development* of the course, which includes the development of a syllabus for the course and learning activities for students (168-69). The objectives within the development of the course focus on the student's interaction with the course material and focus on "learning-centered" (168) objectives, and are devoid of considerations concerning the formation of the student. Finally, the last two areas to consider are *implementation* and *evaluation*, which occur as students engage with the course material, and as students participate in learning activities. Although these considerations are important, the objectives of the classroom for educators involved in online graduate-level ministerial training need to move beyond the learning of students to the formation of students into the image of Christ.

The emphasis on learning-centered objectives continues throughout the last chapter (chap. 17) of the resource, which is written by Meri MacLeod. The chapter

focuses on the importance of learning assessment,⁵⁴ which MacLeod explains is “made up of two connecting components” (175), formative assessments (occurring throughout the duration of a course), and summative assessments (occurring at the conclusion of a course) (175). These assessments necessitate the incorporation of best practices such as the need to incorporate rubrics (176), collaborative assignments and peer reviewed assignments (177-79), clear instructor guidelines for the assignment (178), and a student’s self-reflection on learning. Ultimately, MacLeod ends the chapter by overviewing the growing trend of “learning-centered pedagogies,” which “engage students with complex assignments that reflect real world situations” (179). As such, the formation of students into the image of Christ is not the foundational consideration of the chapter.

The chapter provides important information about the need for clear assessment designs; however, consideration is not given to the theological framework upon which online graduate-level ministerial training should be based, which is formation into the image of Christ. Consequently, students are encouraged to engage in collaborative and peer assessment without any recognition of the formative aspects of these learning exercises, except for a passing statement about the development of “godly attitudes and behaviors” (178). As such, the objectives of the classroom are reduced to the learning of the student, and fall short of objectives centered on a student’s formation into the image of Christ.

The objectives of the classroom. The implementation of best practices for online pedagogy is stressed throughout the *Best Practices of Online Education* resource; however, the theological framework of the best practices is rarely addressed within the resource. The primary objective of the classroom presented within the resource is the effective transformation of information for students, which leads to learning-centered objectives of the classroom. As argued throughout chapter 3 of this dissertation, the

⁵⁴Meri MacLeod, “Assessing Online Learning,” in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 173.

formation of students into the image of Christ should be the ultimate objective of the classroom for online graduate-level ministerial training, and an emphasis on student learning above all else falls short of the formation-centered learning that is necessary for online graduate-level ministerial training.

Purpose of the Institution

Chapter 3 of this dissertation considered the implications of the doctrine of the image of God on understanding the purpose of the institution within online graduate-level ministerial training. The very purpose of an institution offering an online M.Div. program should be to prepare ministers, not pragmatic efficiencies, and ultimately ministerial effectiveness should be defined and viewed as obedience to Christ. As students interact with faculty members who serve as models of Christian formation and as students are formed into the image of Christ through the objectives of the classroom, the institution should seek to make decisions that lead to the furthering of the student's obedience to Christ. Using the apostle Paul's testimony and his view of his position in Christ, it was argued in chapter 3 that the purpose of an institution offering an online M.Div. program should be ministerial effectiveness.

Throughout the *Best Practices of Online Education* resource, the overall purpose of the implementation of online programs is driven primarily by pragmatic efficiency for the institution. The following section demonstrates that this elevation of pragmatic efficiencies is seen most clearly in the emphasis that is placed on the institution's choice to commence with online programs of study. In addition, the implementation of best practices throughout the curriculum is often driven by measures of efficiency throughout the resource, which can lead to an institution compromising its mission.

Elevating pragmatic efficiencies. The emphasis on pragmatic efficiencies is seen from the beginning of the *Best Practices of Online Education* resource. The first chapter of the book begins with considerations of what works within online education,

and not a student's formation into the image of Christ. Authors Mark Heinemann and James Estep explain,

This chapter intends to help those considering or beginning teaching online by briefly introducing the theory and practice of this strange new mode of education. To do this, we will take off from the technological revolution and ascend over certain presuppositions and selected learning theories as they relate to online instruction. From there we will point to certain elements and processes at work in effective online instruction, hopefully landing at an initial overview of the terrain, with our guidebook firmly in hand.⁵⁵

The emphasis on the resource is placed on the technological and pedagogical foundation for online education, with a theological framework often being assumed or overlooked. As such, the pragmatic efficiency of the institution is elevated over the ministerial effectiveness of the student.

The elevation of pragmatic efficiency is seen in chapter 6 of the resource where authors James Estep and Steven Yates address challenges and opportunities for seminaries and Christian institutions desiring to start online degree programs. The starting place of their discussion relates to practical questions related to the institution's mission and vision.⁵⁶ The only mention of theological considerations relates to the authors' section on student challenges and opportunities. They note the importance of spiritual formation within the life of the student, and explain that spiritual formation is one of the standards for the Association for Biblical Higher Education, and the Association of Theological Schools (72); however, these theological considerations are limited to the student's challenges and opportunities, instead of providing a comprehensive theological framework for the institution. Consequently, spiritual formation is viewed as just one consideration along with numerous other equally important considerations, such as the alumni reactions to their school offering online courses (74), incentives for faculty to embrace online education (70), and the need for adequate technological support for

⁵⁵Heinemann and Estep, "Educational Theory," 3–4.

⁵⁶Estep and Yates, "Challenges and Opportunities," 66–67.

online programs (67).

The authors summarize the considerations for an institution in beginning online programs by stating, “Each institution has to ponder the value, cost, and philosophical fit of implementing online education” (75), which are pragmatic considerations and not necessarily considerations driven by a theological framework and a desire to see students formed into the image of Christ as effective ministers of the gospel. In addition, although the chapter considers the institution’s mission and vision, the theological mission or vision was not stressed. Instead, the questions offered for institutions to consider include:

(a) Should we offer a fully online degree? (b) Does a fully online degree meet our accreditation standards? (c) Should we offer online certificates? (d) Where do we think the students are coming from? (e) How much online implementation should we consider? (f) What is an appropriate timeline? (g) Who needs to be involved in the decisions? (67)

These questions are important for an institution to consider; however, they are not the first questions an institution desiring to offer online graduate-level ministerial training should consider, as these questions are driven by the pragmatic efficiency of the institution and not the ministerial effectiveness of the student.

Chapter 14, which speaks to “Developing Online Programs,”⁵⁷ also evidences the elevation of pragmatic efficiencies over ministerial effectiveness. Author David Phillips explains “six strategic factors” for institutions to consider concerning online education: purpose, investment, buy-in, support structures, accreditation approval, and marketing and recruitment (148-52). Phillips writes, “The degree to which an institution approaches these factors with a commitment to quality will determine the potential for the growth and sustainability of the program” (148). As his first strategic factor, Phillips notes the importance of tying the decision to offer online courses to mission of the institution (148-49); however, he does not directly relate the decision to offer online courses to any

⁵⁷Phillips, “Developing Online Programs,” 147–54.

theological framework, and as a result, pragmatic considerations are suggested for an institution to consider. For example, support services mention nothing of the need for spiritual support to the online community, buy-in from faculty does not consider the spiritual value online education can bring to students, and the investment of an academic leader and appropriate technology relate to effective teaching, devoid of any noted theological framework of considerations. Ministerial effectiveness is not a consideration, and consequently pragmatic efficiencies are elevated as the driving purpose of an institution's decision to offer online degree programs and courses.

Compromising the institution's mission. As a consequence of ministerial effectiveness being removed from the primary purpose of the institution, the mission of the institution is compromised. A result of the compromise is seen when institutions attempt to implement best practices within their online programs. For instance, C. Damon Osborne's chapter in the resource entitled, "Best Practices in Online Teaching"⁵⁸ has no mention of anything theological or biblical in the entire chapter, as though best practices for teaching online at Christian institutions are exactly the same as teaching online at any institution. Ministerial effectiveness is not a consideration in the chapter, as the best practices do not include any aspects of the formation of students into the image of Christ, or the ministerial effectiveness of the students.

Decisions of the institution beyond just the role of the faculty member and the purpose of the classroom are also affected by an institution's approach to making decisions about online pedagogy. For instance, Eric Kellerer writes about an institution's selection of a Course Management Systems (CMS) in chapter 12 of the resource.⁵⁹ Kellerer explains factors that should go into the decision of an institution concerning the CMS,

⁵⁸Osborne, "Best Practices in Online Teaching," 81–90.

⁵⁹Eric Kellerer, "Evaluating Course Management Systems," in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 131–37.

and notes that financial considerations are not the only factors in making a decision.⁶⁰ However, there is no mention within the chapter of tying the purchase of the CMS to any theological considerations, or factors related to the selection of a CMS that could affect the formation of students or ministerial effectiveness. At most, the author mentions the need to root the decision for a CMS to the problem the institution is trying to solve;⁶¹ however, there is no indication that this problem would be theological in nature.

The need for an institution to establish protocols and standards within online courses and programs are also considered in chapter 13 of the *Best Practices of Online Education* resource, where Gregory Bourgond writes about “Developing Effective Infrastructure for Online Programs.”⁶² The chapter addresses the need for standards within courses that include weekly communication from the faculty member to students, required discussion forums, use of an established course template, and required video introductions from faculty members to their students (140-41). Also, areas of assessment and evaluation of faculty and courses are overviewed (141-42), and the chapter speaks to the need for protocols for courses, as related to the use of discussion boards, video presentations, podcasts, and other instructional technologies used within the online course (143). Bourgond summarizes the need for protocols: “Every technology used in a course should have an acceptable and approved protocol for its use with the option to expand on the protocol if the objectives of the course or topic require such adjustment” (143). The best practices as related to an effective infrastructure for online courses in the areas of standards, protocols, organization, and planning are helpful; however, the chapter does not focus on how these standards and protocols can ensure an institution is staying true to its purpose of training graduates for ministerial effectiveness and ensuring that the

⁶⁰Ibid., 136.

⁶¹Ibid., 132, 136.

⁶²Gregory Bourgond, “Developing Effective Infrastructure for Online Programs,” in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 139–46.

formation of students into the image of Christ is the primary focus of the online course offerings.

The purpose of the institution. The need for an institution to tie decisions related to online programs and courses to the mission of the institution is stressed throughout the resource; however, the picture of the mission of the institution presented throughout the resources is a picture of an institution primarily concerned with pragmatic efficiencies. For institutions offering online graduate-level ministerial training, the purpose of the institution must be designed to focus on the formation of students into the image of Christ for ministerial effectiveness. The purpose of ministerial effectiveness will provide the institution with a standard for making decisions, and for implementing best practices concerning the role of the faculty member and the objectives of the online classroom.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on David Powlison's second epistemological priority—critiquing, debunking, and reinterpreting alternative models—as related to online graduate-level ministerial training. Deficiencies in the articulation of a theological foundation within the resource, *Best Practices of Online Education: A Guide for Christian Higher Education*, were presented, particularly related to the practice of the integration of faith and learning and specifically regarding the primacy of Scripture. Throughout the chapter, it was argued that three primary weaknesses result from these deficiencies: a reduction in the role of the faculty to being a facilitator of learning instead of a model for students to follow, a reduction in the objectives of the classroom to being learning centered instead of formation centered, and a reduction in the purpose of the institution to pragmatic efficiency instead of ministerial effectiveness. For educators involved in online graduate-level ministerial training, the formation of students into the image of Christ must be the primary goal of offering courses and programs, which necessitates a theological framework that gives primacy to Scripture.

CHAPTER 5
TOWARD A THEOLOGICALLY INFORMED
ONLINE PEDAGOGY

The thesis of this dissertation has been that by utilizing a biblical-theological framework based on a thoroughly biblical perspective of human nature, best practices of online graduate-level ministerial training can be presented in such a way that the role of the faculty moves beyond being a guide for students to being a model for students to follow, the objectives of the classroom move beyond learning-centered objectives to formation-centered objectives, and the purpose of the institution moves beyond pragmatic efficiency to the ministerial effectiveness of the student, so that students are prepared to be ministers of the gospel. This chapter focuses on David Powlison’s third epistemological priority—learning from defective models—which Powlison explains by stating, “The truth of the mind of Christ (priority one) critiques us (priority two) and remakes us, folding and reinterpreting all of life’s learning and experience (priority three) into God’s pattern and story (priority one).”¹ Applying Powlison’s third priority to the context of online graduate-level ministerial training, this chapter addresses how best practices of online pedagogy can be utilized and reinterpreted based on a theological framework that is built on a biblical view of human nature so that the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution, are focused on the formation of students as ministers of the gospel.

¹David Powlison, “Questions at the Crossroads: The Care of Souls and the Modern Psychotherapies,” in *Care for the Soul*, ed. Mark R. McMinn and Timothy R. Phillips (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 36.

Application Points for Online Pedagogy

Chapter 3 of this dissertation laid the foundation to establish what the role of the faculty member, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution should be as related to online graduate-level ministerial training. By considering a current resource in the field of online Christian education, chapter 4 of the dissertation explained the implications for best practices when the biblical-theological framework for online graduate-level ministerial training lacks articulation and implementation. This current chapter considers application points of best practices for online graduate-level ministerial training based on a biblical view of human nature. In order to consider these best practices, points of application for each of the three areas (role of the faculty, objectives of the classroom, and purpose of the institution) are considered individually.

The Role of the Faculty

Chapter 3 of this dissertation utilized the apostle Paul's ministry and life as an example and argued that the role of the faculty member within online graduate-level ministerial training should be a model for students to follow. Chapter 4 of this dissertation presented a critique of the resource *Best Practices of Online Education*,² and concluded that throughout the resource the role of the faculty member is primarily about content delivery and the facilitation of learning. In the resource, the online faculty member is presented as an individual who has competency in an academic discipline, and competency in the medium of online learning; however, the need for the faculty member to model spiritual formation is either assumed, or overlooked entirely. In the following, two points of application are presented to help ensure that the faculty member teaching in the context of online graduate-level ministerial training is a model for students to follow, which will assist in the formation of students into the image of Christ.

²Mark A. Maddix, James R. Estep, and Mary Ella Lowe, eds., *Best Practices of Online Education: A Guide for Christian Higher Education* (Charlotte, NC: Information Age, 2012).

Application 1: Hire the right faculty. The first application for online pedagogy in graduate-level ministerial training is that in order to have faculty members who are models for students to follow, *the institution should prioritize theological competencies ahead of technological and pedagogical competencies when hiring faculty.* Perhaps more than any other aspect of online graduate-level ministerial training, the faculty member is the most vital component. Frank Gaebelein acknowledges, “The school or college that would develop a Christ-centered and biblically grounded program must fly from its mast this standard, ‘No Christian education without Christian teachers,’ and must never under any conditions pull its colors down.”³ David Dockery also notes the importance of hiring the right faculty: “The right to hire will likely be the most important legal issue that Christian colleges and universities face in the near future.”⁴ Chapter 3 of this dissertation argued that the faculty member must be a model for students to follow, which necessitates hiring the right faculty members. Much of the literature concerning online Christian education emphasize the need for pedagogical and technological competencies of faculty teaching online,⁵ which are important considerations; however, there is also a need for faculty to meet theological competencies. In chapter 4 of this dissertation, the need for online faculty with a change of perspective from the traditional face-to-face teaching was noted, yet the perspective change was focused on understanding the medium of online pedagogy, and not the importance of the faculty member’s theological competencies.⁶ Part of these theological

³Frank E. Gaebelein, *The Pattern of God’s Truth* (Whittier, CA: Association of Christian Schools International, 1968), 37.

⁴David S. Dockery, *Renewing Minds: Serving Church and Society through Christian Higher Education*, rev. and updated (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 2, Kindle.

⁵Dale Hale, “Online Faculty Development,” in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 122, 126.

⁶*Ibid.*, 122.

competencies includes the doctrinal statement of the institution;⁷ yet, in addition to the doctrinal statement, the faculty of the institution must have a commitment to a biblical worldview. This biblical worldview permeates all areas of one's life and determines the faculty member's approach to teaching, mentoring, and overall position as a faculty member within the context of online graduate-level ministerial training.

In essence, a worldview is "simply the total set of beliefs that a person has about the biggest questions in life."⁸ James Sire offers a detailed explanation of a worldview:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) that we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.⁹

The worldview of the faculty member extends to all areas of life; as such, the faculty member must understand the theological implications of not only formal online pedagogy, but also interaction with the student outside of the online classroom. As chapter 3 of this dissertation explained, humanity's creation in the image of God affects all relationships (with God, with others, and with God's creation);¹⁰ all areas of life are affected. The faculty member's engagement with the student outside of a classroom setting through the use of media (technology) such as video, chat, and email, should be

⁷Duane Litfin provides an overview of two distinct approaches within Christian institutions regarding the institution's commitment to a doctrinal statement. The two approaches presented by Litfin are the *umbrella* approach (which provides more diversity of beliefs, with a core of individuals holding to the institution's doctrinal statement) and the *systemic* approach (which requires all faculty to adhere to the written doctrinal statement of the institution). Duane Litfin, *Conceiving the Christian College* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004).

⁸Jonathan Morrow, *Think Christianly: Looking at the Intersection of Faith and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 69.

⁹James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalog*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 20.

¹⁰Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 95.

built on the foundation of the theological competencies of the faculty member. As chapter 3 of this dissertation presented, the faculty member's role must move beyond being a guide for students (pedagogical and technological competencies) to a model for the students to follow (theological competencies).

In addition to the faculty member's adherence to a biblical worldview, the institution should consider the faculty member's view of the relationship between faith and learning. Chapter 4 of this dissertation emphasized the primacy of Scripture concerning the intersection of theology, technology, and pedagogy. Kenneth Gangel speaks to the importance of developing a view of integration among the faculty, and offers six principles concerning the integration of faith and learning: (1) "a commitment to the author of the Bible,"¹¹ (2) "a recognition of the contemporaneity of the Bible and the Holy Spirit,"¹² (3) "a clear understanding of the nature, source, discovery, and dissemination of truth,"¹³ (4) "designing a curriculum which is totally constructed on the centrality of special revelation,"¹⁴ (5) "a demand for the development of a Christian world and life view,"¹⁵ and (6) "bibliocentric education extend to all areas of student life."¹⁶

Gangel's fourth principle evidences the primacy of Scripture within the curriculum, and as such, the primacy of Scripture affects all other areas of the curriculum, and, as is noted by his sixth principle, extends beyond just the curriculum to "all areas of student life" (105). This recognition by Gangel corresponds to Powlison's epistemological priorities (utilized throughout this dissertation), which prioritize Scripture

¹¹Kenneth O. Gangel, "Integrating Faith and Learning : Principles and Process," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135, no. 538 (1978): 100.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., 101.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 104.

¹⁶Ibid., 105.

as the starting point of engagement between God’s special revelation and God’s general revelation. Consequently, all educational practices need to be filtered through the centrality of this biblical-theological framework, which sees the role of the faculty member as a model to follow. The permeation of this biblical worldview and the primacy of Scripture are stressed by Gangel by what he calls a “theological sieve” (105), which acts as a filtering system to reject information that does not correspond to a biblical worldview. Among the implications for the need for a theological sieve is that Scripture informs this sieve (105-6), which means each teacher within a Christian institution must be at least an “amateur theologian” (106). The need for this theological foundation is based on the need for teachers to incorporate theological and biblical teaching into every subject matter (106-7), as the image of God affects all areas of life, and spiritual formation into the image of Christ involves the entire person. For online graduate-level ministerial training, the primacy of Scripture within the faculty member’s approach to one’s educational philosophy, the agreement with the institution’s statement of faith, and the faculty member seeing oneself as a model for students to follow, are all vitally important theological considerations.

Since the role of the faculty member should be a model to follow, for educators involved in online graduate-level ministerial training, hiring the right faculty is vitally important. As the apostle Paul considered himself a model for others to follow (presented in chap. 3 of this dissertation), the faculty member must consider one’s role as an online faculty member a model of spiritual formation for students to follow. Hiring faculty with competencies in theological, technological, and pedagogical competencies will help ensure online graduate-level ministerial training is focused on the formation of students into the image of Christ to assist the students in becoming effective ministers of the gospel; however, the initial hiring of faculty with these competencies is not enough, ongoing development and evaluation of faculty must be a priority of the institution.

Application 2: Develop and evaluate faculty. The second application for

online pedagogy in graduate-level ministerial training is that order to have faculty members who are models for students to follow, *the institution should prioritize the faculty member's ongoing spiritual formation in the development and evaluation of theological, pedagogical, and technological competencies*. Chapter 13 of *Best Practices of Online Education* stresses the need for an institution to establish protocols and standards within online courses and programs.¹⁷ These protocols and standards help to establish an effective infrastructure for online courses in the areas of standards, protocols, organization, and planning; however, in order to ensure faculty members are a model for students to follow, educators within the context of online graduate-level ministerial training must also continue to develop and evaluate the faculty according to theological considerations. As chapter 4 of this dissertation demonstrated, standards related to just technological and pedagogical competencies are not enough because the role of the faculty member extends beyond efficiently managing an online classroom, or effectively communicating within the medium of an online classroom. The role of the faculty member is more than a conveyor of information, the role of the faculty member is a model of spiritual formation into the image of Christ, and as such, theological competencies must also be evaluated and developed within the faculty member that evidence the faculty member's spiritual formation.

Ultimately, as the faculty member is a model for students to follow, the faculty member's standard of development and evaluation should be measured by the faculty member's formation into the image of Christ. Robert Pazmiño stresses the importance of a faculty member modeling Christ through teaching by arguing, "The five Christian virtues of truth, love, faith, hope, and joy [should] serve to guide teaching that faithfully represents Jesus today."¹⁸ For instance, the aspect of truth emphasized by Pazmiño

¹⁷Gregory Bourgon, "Developing Effective Infrastructure for Online Programs," in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 139–46.

¹⁸Robert W. Pazmiño, "Teaching in the Name of Jesus," *Christian Education Journal* 5, no. 1

emphasizes the need for teachers to demonstrate the love of Christ throughout their teaching, which is a sign of the teacher's integrity.¹⁹ The need for the foundation of a biblical view of human nature is seen in Pazmiño's statements about the image of God:

Persons are created in the very image of God (Gen. 1:27) and as God's creatures are accountable to fulfill God's purposes for all of creation. Persons find their primary identity as children of God and potentially friends and followers of Jesus Christ and vessels of the Holy Spirit in the world.²⁰

In addition, Pazmiño stresses the teacher should have a love for teaching, and the students.²¹ This foundation of love and commitment to others is a direct result of humanity's creation in the image of God, and is an essential characteristic of faculty development and evaluation. As chapter 4 of this dissertation demonstrated, when the foundation or articulation of a theological framework is lacking, the emphasis of development concerning students focuses on technological competencies and general character formation, and not formation into the image of Christ.²² By articulating and utilizing a theological framework of competencies such as suggested by Pazmiño, the role of the faculty member can be developed and evaluated based on the faculty member's evidence of formation into the image of Christ.

Explaining the significance of faith, Pazmiño states, "The venture of Christian teaching calls for faith in one's own identity as a teacher and faith in the presence of God's Spirit to empower the effort."²³ The aspect of hope in teaching in Jesus' name

(2008): 171.

¹⁹Ibid., 175.

²⁰Ibid., 173.

²¹Ibid., 176–79.

²²Jason Baker, "Characteristics of Successful Online Students," in *Best Practices of Online Education*, 103-5.

²³Pazmiño, "Teaching in the Name of Jesus," 179.

“fosters a sense of hope for persons, families, groups, and communities.”²⁴ The joy that comes from teaching is explained by the author as well: “I would maintain that joy is the emotion closest to the heart of God and that our human celebration of joy in both public worship and festival or fiesta provides the occasion for our hearts to touch or be in communion with God’s heart.”²⁵ Within the context of online graduate-level ministerial training, joy can be displayed through the overall communication of the faculty member with students concerning the content of the course, and the connection with one’s local church’s gatherings. The virtues of Christ as displayed through the faculty member are an indication of the formation of that faculty member into the image of Christ. In addition to pedagogical and technological competencies and standards, the demonstration of Christian virtues, such as truth, love, faith, hope, and joy should be theological standards of teaching that faculty involved in online graduate-level ministerial training should be developed in and evaluated on, concerning their role as a model for students to follow.

The Objectives of the Classroom

Once the right faculty members are hired for teaching in the context of online graduate-level ministerial training, the institution can then focus on ensuring the objectives of the classroom are focused on the formation of the student. Chapter 3 of this dissertation considered the implications of the doctrine of the image of God on understanding the objectives of the classroom within online graduate-level ministerial training, and it argued that the ultimate objectives of the classroom should move beyond learner-centered, or learning-centered objectives, to formation-centered objectives. Using the apostle Paul as an example in Philippians 2, and specifically the example of humility provided by Christ, it is argued in chapter 3 of this dissertation that the focus of the online classroom within online graduate-level ministerial training should be on the formation of

²⁴Ibid., 181.

²⁵Ibid., 186.

students into the image of Christ. Chapter 4 of this dissertation presented a critique of the resource *Best Practices of Online Education*, and argued that the resource stresses the transferring of information, and ultimately the learning of the student, and although student learning is important for online graduate-level ministerial training, the formation of students into the image of Christ must be the primary objective of the classroom. In the following, points of application are presented to help educators develop formation-centered objectives for online graduate-level ministerial training, which will assist in the formation of students into the image of Christ, and prepare students to be effective ministers of the gospel.

Application 3: Establish social presence. The third application for online pedagogy in graduate-level ministerial training is that in order to establish formation-centered classrooms, *the faculty member should utilize social presence within online courses that prioritizes the formation of students over the learning of students*. Chapter 3 of this dissertation argued that humanity's creation in the image of God includes aspects of an individual's relationship to God, to others, and to God's creation. The previous section spoke about hiring the right faculty for teaching in the context of online graduate-level ministerial training, and primarily, this hiring relates to understanding the individual's relationship to God. In this section, the focus is on the faculty member's establishment of a relationship with others (i.e., students). This relationship with others in the context of online learning presents unique challenges and opportunities for the faculty member, especially as it relates to the distance between the faculty member and the student. In order to overcome the potential barrier of distance between the faculty member and the student, faculty must establish social presence with students in the online classroom, which will provide the faculty member opportunities to model Christ, and ultimately help lead to the formation of students into the image of Christ. As such, the establishment of social presence is not primarily about pragmatic considerations of the institution, such as the retention of students; rather, the establishment of social presence

provides the faculty member an opportunity to model Christ to students, and to be involved in the lives of students—even at a distance—as was the example provided by the apostle Paul with various individuals and churches during his ministry.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation noted John Gresham’s work on the perspective of online education and the *divine pedagogy*, which he describes as the “manner in which God teaches the human race.”²⁶ Gresham argues that the physical presence of the instructor is not essential in all forms of pedagogy, and community can be established apart from face-to-face instruction, as personal interaction is available within the online environment with “a number of communication resources, ranging from one-to-one email, group discussion, and personal feedback to video, audio, and interactive media, by which an instructor can personally express and witness how the truth is incarnate in his or her life” (27). As is noted in chapter 2 of this dissertation, Gresham argues that instead of making the student come to the professor, quite literally the professor is now willing to go to the student, which is a demonstration of humility (patterned after the example of Christ) (26). In this sense, the incarnational example of Christ can be evidenced within the online classroom as professors model the ability to communicate to students in an online format, and model for students one’s own formation into the image of Christ. Gresham writes that the “key is the instructor’s communication rather than the educational environment” (26). It is important to note Gresham acknowledges “while physical presence is crucial to certain aspects of an incarnational faith, it does not seem to be an essential factor in an incarnational pedagogy” (27). Modeling formation into the image of Christ within the online classroom helps to demonstrate effective relationships with God and with others, which is itself a reflection of mankind’s creation in the image of God, and requires humility on the part of the faculty member.

Christopher Jackson’s research was mentioned in chapter 3 of this dissertation

²⁶John Gresham, “The Divine Pedagogy as a Model for Online Education,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 9, no. 1 (2006): 24, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9647.2006.00257.x.

as it relates to the role of the faculty member. It is argued by Jackson that the apostle Paul was able to establish social presence even at a distance by the use of written words (in Paul's case letters to various churches).²⁷ Jackson argues that Paul's physical absence may have been a benefit at times, as the churches were able to more independently process through Paul's requests and statements rather than being forced to respond to Paul if he were physically present.²⁸ Paul utilized his letters to churches as a means of being personally present (although not physically present) with the church.²⁹ Part of the implications that Jackson argues for is the commitment of institutions to provide training for faculty and students in the area of social presence.³⁰ This training would provide tools and techniques for faculty to understand the importance of social presence, and to equip faculty to help foster increased social presence within the online classroom. One such technique is the establishment of learning communities within the online format, which is built on the foundation of the need for relationships within humanity (an indication of creation in the image of God), and is an additional point of application for online graduate-level ministerial training.

Application 4: Create community. The fourth application for online pedagogy in graduate-level ministerial training is that in order to establish formation-centered classrooms, *the faculty member should create community with and among students, beyond social presence, that prioritizes the formation of students over the learning of students.* As is argued in chapter 3 of this dissertation, humanity's creation in the image

²⁷Christopher Dwight Jackson, "The Phenomenon of Social Presence in the Pauline Epistles and Its Implications for Practices of Online Education" (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 58.

²⁸Ibid., 59.

²⁹Ibid., 61–62.

³⁰Ibid., 77.

of God speaks to humanity's need for relationships with God and others (son-ship and ruler-ship),³¹ and for online graduate-level ministerial training there is a need to establish relationships with others. Beyond simply being present within the classroom (i.e. social presence), in order for formation of students to occur, the faculty member must seek to establish healthy communities within the online classroom. John Cartwright's research on best practices concurs by stating that best practices "emphasize faculty as spiritual models when facilitating and leading discussions, wikis, or video chat."³² As these communities are established with the goal of spiritual formation as a foundation, the faculty member is better able to model spiritual formation to students, and students are better able to interact with one another for learning, and ultimately for formation.

An example of the theological significance of interaction between students is found in the work of Mary Lowe and Stephen Lowe where they address the need for believers to connect to fulfill the *one another commands* of Scripture.³³ Four implications are drawn from their investigation: (1) Christians should be more intentional about fostering relationships, (2) Christians should pay attention to the reciprocal statements within Scripture, (3) Christians should seek to understand and live out the implications of the workings of the Holy Spirit through human relationships, and (4) Christians should seek to develop deep relationships that will lead to transformed lives.³⁴ As was demonstrated in chapter 3 of this dissertation, the apostle Paul was intentional to establish and maintain relationships with others at a distance in an effort to assist in the spiritual

³¹Peter Gentry, "Kingdom through Covenant," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 27.

³²John Beck Cartwright, Jr., "Best Practices for Online Ministry Preparation: A Delphi Method Study" (Ed.D. thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 97.

³³Stephen D. Lowe and Mary E. Lowe, "Allelon: Reciprocal Commands and Christian Development," *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (2010): 281.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 295.

formation of others. The establishment of community within an online classroom among and with students is an effective way to bring about an environment where the formation of the student is possible.

Lester Ruth explains the significance of discussion forums as the foundation for an online course by noting, “Discussions were not some by-product intruding into my agenda for the course. They were the course. I had to manage them well.”³⁵ Ruth describes his role as a teacher within the online classroom converting from the conveyer of information to the “creator of learning environments.”³⁶ Likewise, he notes that the role of the student changed, as the student was no longer a passive listener or reader, but rather, the student was now a participant in the learning process.³⁷ Chapter 3 of this dissertation argued that the example of Christ is an example of humility, as was demonstrated by the apostle Paul in Philippians 2. In humility, the faculty member must approach students and seek to establish community with and among students. Within the context of online graduate-level ministerial training, the establishment of community reflects humanity’s creation in the image of God and formation into the image of Christ, and provides students with an environment to interact with God, with others, and with God’s creation. In addition, as chapter 3 of this dissertation presented, Forrest and Lamport stress the importance of grounding online communities on the centrality of the gospel,³⁸ which will assist in the establishment of right relationships to God, to others, and to God’s creation. All of these considerations point to the implication for online graduate-level ministerial

³⁵Lester Ruth, “Converting My Course Converted Me: How Reinventing an On-campus Course for an Online Environment Reinvigorated My Teaching,” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 9, no. 4 (2006): 237, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9647.2006.00289.x.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 238.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 241.

³⁸Benjamin K. Forrest and Mark A. Lamport, “Modeling Spiritual Formation from a Distance: Paul’s Formation Transactions with the Roman Christians,” *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 1 (2013): 116–17.

training that for spiritual formation to occur within the life of the student, the establishment of community with and among students is essential.

The Purpose of the Institution

Chapter 3 of this dissertation considered the implications of the doctrine of the image of God on understanding the purpose of the institution within online graduate-level ministerial training. Throughout chapter 3 it was argued that the very purpose of an institution offering an online M.Div. program should be to prepare ministers, not pragmatic efficiencies, and ultimately ministerial effectiveness should be defined and viewed as obedience to Christ. As students are interacting with faculty members who serve as models of Christian formation, and as students are being formed into the image of Christ through the objectives of the classroom, the institution should seek to make decisions that lead to the furthering of the student's obedience to Christ. Using the apostle Paul's testimony and his view of his position in Christ, it is argued in chapter 3 of this dissertation that the purpose of an institution offering an online M.Div. program should be ministerial effectiveness, which evidences itself through Paul's testimony and his view of his position in Christ as a slave of Christ. In the following, points of application based on a theological framework of mankind's creation in the image of God are presented to help educators ensure the purpose of the institution will focus on the ministerial effectiveness of the students, which will assist in the formation of students into the image of Christ.

Application 5: Leverage the student's context. The fifth application for online pedagogy in graduate-level ministerial training is that in order to develop the ministerial effectiveness of the student, *online graduate-level ministerial training should extend beyond the online classroom by utilizing the student's local church context for the spiritual formation and ministerial preparation of the student.* The need for establishing community within the online course in order to assist in the formation of students into the

image of Christ has already been discussed within this chapter. However, since the formation of students is a process that affects all areas of the student's life, online graduate-level ministerial training must embrace more than just the student's experience within the classroom. The apostle Paul modeled this approach of utilizing his context throughout his ministry, and sought to foster this understanding with those he trained. F. LeRon Shults explains,

For truly transformational learning to occur in seminarians, it is crucial for us to provide an integrative environment in which they see their intellectual task (theological exploration) as inherently connected to their relation to God (spiritual and personal formation) and to their ministry with the people of God (transformational leadership).³⁹

Noting that the image of God is more than just relationships,⁴⁰ it is important to also note the environment where education is conducted. As chapter 2 of this dissertation presented, Smith indicates the importance of the habits, or liturgies, that influence an individual's desires,⁴¹ and notes the importance of gathering Christians outside of just a typical Sunday morning worship service.⁴² In a similar way, the apostle Paul viewed all areas of his life as opportunities for Christ to work through him, including imprisonments, beatings, and sufferings (1 Cor 11). Individuals involved in online graduate-level ministerial training should see the context of the student as an opportunity for further spiritual formation.

Smith notes that what an individual or community loves is what defines and distinguishes that individual or community,⁴³ and he argues that the goal of Christian

³⁹F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), 67.

⁴⁰James R. Estep, Michael Anthony, and Greg Allison, *A Theology for Christian Education* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 180.

⁴¹James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 26.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 213.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 52.

education should be the same as Christian worship, which is to

form radical disciples of Jesus and citizens of the baptismal city, who, communally, take up the creational task of being God’s image bearers, unfolding the cultural possibilities latent in creation—but doing so as empowered by the Spirit, following the example of Jesus’ cruciform cultural labor. . . . If something like Christian universities are to exist, they should be configured as extensions of the mission of the church—as chapels that extend and amplify what’s happening at the heart of the cathedral, at the altar of Christian worship. In short, the task of Christian educators needs to be reconnected to the thick practices of the church.⁴⁴

Smith’s comments are reflected in the practices and model of the apostle Paul, and should be evident within the context of online graduate-level ministerial training, where the context of the student is utilized to assist in the formation of the student as a minister of the gospel. In addition, leveraging the context of the student is noted in Cartwright’s research on the best practices for ministry preparation, which argues that best practices “utilize in-context experiences for the practice of and reflection on ministerial service such as mercy ministry, personal evangelism, or preaching.”⁴⁵ The importance of the student’s ministerial context can be important to the student, and can be leveraged within online graduate-level ministerial training.

Returning to the arguments presented by Gresham (as explored in chapter 2 of this dissertation) from the perspective of the divine pedagogy, online education can effectively reflect the incarnational example of Christ.⁴⁶ By *incarnational*, Gresham stresses that students participating in online courses have no need to leave their physical setting to attend class, so these students can remain in the flesh in their setting of work or ministry.⁴⁷ Ultimately, Gresham concludes,

The incarnation as a central aspect of the divine pedagogy does not privilege face-to-face instruction over virtual learning but rather calls all theological educators,

⁴⁴Ibid., 220.

⁴⁵Cartwright, “Best Practices for Online Ministry Preparation,” 97.

⁴⁶Gresham, “The Divine Pedagogy.”

⁴⁷Ibid., 27.

whether teaching in the classroom or online, to en flesh their teaching in their own lives and to assist their students to do likewise.⁴⁸

This incarnational aspect, which is itself a picture of the faculty member modeling formation into the image of Christ, can also be present within the student’s ministerial context, and allows the student to be incarnational in the lives of others while participating in an online graduate-level ministerial training program.

Stephen Lowe explores the idea of community and formation through distance education models of learning and notes the “church possesses a spiritual unity and connectedness that should not and cannot be limited to physical and face-to-face encounters.”⁴⁹ Concerning the context of online graduate-level ministerial training, the corporate body of Christ is a reflection of humanity’s creation in the image of God through the relationships established with God, with others, and with God’s creation. As such, online graduate-level ministerial training extends beyond the walls of a church, and the sense of community among believers is not limited to only when believers are all together in one physical place. Lowe explains the ecology of learning relates to all aspects of a student’s life,⁵⁰ and incorporates various aspects of the student’s experience, including the classroom environment, interaction with other students, interaction with the faculty, and the various interactions within the student’s daily life, such as the student’s church, local community, and place of employment. By leveraging the context of the student, especially the local church context, online graduate-level ministerial training will be able to focus on the objective of the formation of students in the image of Christ in order to prepare the student to be an effective minister of the gospel.

Application 6: Serve the church. The sixth application for online pedagogy

⁴⁸Ibid., 28.

⁴⁹Stephen D. Lowe, “Building Community and Facilitating Formation in Seminary Distance Education,” *Christian Perspectives in Education* 4, no. 1 (2010): 10.

⁵⁰Ibid., 20–30.

in graduate-level ministerial training is that in order to develop the ministerial effectiveness of the student, *online graduate-level ministerial training should elevate the formation of the student as a minister of the gospel within the local church over the retention of the student or the knowledge gained by the student*. Online graduate-level ministerial training should recognize its role in serving the church. Smith observes,

While not being a church, or a substitute for the church, but rather an extension of it (a chapel connected to the nave of the cathedral), the new monastic university will be an institution of Christian formation, intentionally drawing on and incorporating the range of Christian practices that form desire and fuel the imagination.⁵¹

Although the context of online graduate-level ministerial training may be different than Smith's vision of the "new monastic university," the need for the institution to serve the church remains. Ministerial training should be viewed within the realm of serving the greater Christian community through the preparation of individuals to fulfill God's vocational calling on their lives. Theologically informed ministerial training prepares students for particular fields of study, but also prepares students for a life-long service to the body of Christ through a local church, as the apostle Paul modeled through his understanding of his life as a slave of Christ (as presented in chapter 3 of this dissertation).

Part of serving the church is the involvement of the student within a local church, which is possible within online graduate-level ministerial training, since the student is able to remain within a local context. Cartwright emphasizes the distance represented in both face-to-face and online mediums of education by noting,

Distance is inevitable in seminary education. It is a matter of choosing which distance is preferable, distance from faculty (online education) or distance from one's in-context community (residential education). The online student has the disadvantage of distance with a faculty member, while having a tremendous advantage of proximity to his or her community.⁵²

In the context of online graduate-level ministerial training, the student is able to be in the

⁵¹Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 222.

⁵²Cartwright, "Best Practices for Online Ministry Preparation," 104.

context of the local church (as was previously discussed), which means online curriculum development and programs should be designed to serve the local church.

Robert Banks explains the need for theological education to be field-based, which involves some measure of doing what is being studied,⁵³ and notes that all training in theological education must be completed with the end in mind, which is action and practice. Banks argues that theological institutions too often take students away from their local settings and fail to train the students with the habits and skills necessary for effective ministry,⁵⁴ but online graduate-level ministerial training is able to provide both the training (via online) and the experience (via the local church). Banks notes that this common failure to train students in the habits and skills for effective ministry is due in part to seminaries adopting secular models of education, and explains there is a need to establish a biblical and theological foundation, or approach, for theological education.⁵⁵ As educators within the context of online graduate-level ministerial training hire and develop the right faculty who see their role as a model for students to follow, establish online classroom experiences where the faculty member is able to establish relationships with students with the objective of spiritual formation, and utilize the local church context of the student, students will be formed into the image of Christ and will be prepared to be effective ministers of the gospel.

Conclusion

This chapter presents application points for online graduate-level ministerial training that are based on a biblical view of human nature, which relate to the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution. By considering

⁵³Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 142.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 6.

the implications of the image of God on the role of the faculty, it is argued that in order to have faculty members who are models for students to follow, institutions should prioritize theological competencies ahead of technological and pedagogical competencies when hiring faculty. In addition to hiring the right faculty, in order to have faculty members who are models for students to follow, institutions should prioritize each faculty member's ongoing spiritual formation in the development and evaluation of theological, pedagogical, and technological competencies. It is also argued that the objectives of the classroom within online graduate-level ministerial training must be focused on the formation of students into the image of Christ, which necessitates that the faculty member should utilize social presence within online courses that prioritizes the formation of students over the learning of students. Also, in order to establish formation-centered classrooms, the faculty member should create community with and among students, beyond social presence, that prioritizes the formation of students over the learning of students. Finally, it is argued that the purpose of the institution should focus on the ministerial effectiveness of the student as an individual formed into the image of Christ, and that in order to develop the ministerial effectiveness of the student, online graduate-level ministerial training should extend beyond the online classroom by utilizing the student's local church context for the spiritual formation and ministerial preparation of the student. Additionally, in order to develop the ministerial effectiveness of the student, online graduate-level ministerial training should elevate the formation of the student as a minister of the gospel within the local church over the retention of the student or the knowledge gained by the student. By basing these application points on a theological framework of the biblical view of human nature, best practices of online graduate-level ministerial training can be presented in such a way that the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution are focused more effectively on the formation of students as ministers of the gospel. Table 3 presents the application points of theological anthropology for online pedagogy in graduate-level ministerial training.

Table 3. Application points of theological anthropology for online pedagogy in graduate-level ministerial training

Biblical/Theological Foundation	Implications	Application Points
<p>Mankind is created in the Image of God</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - son-ship (relationship to God) - ruler-ship (relationship to others) <p>Mankind represents God to others and to God's creation</p> <p>Mankind's creation in the Image of God is ultimately a statement about God</p>	<p>Mankind is to be conformed into Christ's Image (Rom 8:29)</p> <p>Apostle Paul uses himself as a model of spiritual formation for others to follow (1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:17)</p>	<p>Application 1 In order to have faculty members who are models for students to follow, <i>the institution should prioritize theological competencies ahead of technological and pedagogical competencies when hiring faculty.</i></p> <p>Application 2 In order to have faculty members who are models for students to follow, <i>the institution should prioritize the faculty member's ongoing spiritual formation in the development and evaluation of theological, pedagogical, and technological competencies.</i></p>
	<p>Christ models spiritual formation through obedience to Heavenly Father and humility (Phil 2)</p> <p>Spiritual formation is a transformed mind (Rom 12:1, 2)</p>	<p>Objectives of the Classroom: Formation-centered</p> <p>Application 3 In order to establish formation-centered classrooms, <i>the faculty member should utilize social presence within online courses that prioritizes the formation of students over the learning of students.</i></p> <p>Application 4 In order to establish formation-centered classrooms, <i>the faculty member should create community with and among students, beyond social presence, that prioritizes the formation of students over the learning of students.</i></p>
	<p>Apostle Paul views ministerial effectiveness as obedience to Christ (Phil 3:7-11)</p> <p>Apostle Paul considered himself a slave of Christ (Rom 6; 1 Cor 9)</p>	<p>Purpose of the Institution: Ministerial Effectiveness</p> <p>Application 5 In order to develop the ministerial effectiveness of the student, <i>online graduate-level ministerial training should extend beyond the online classroom by utilizing the student's local church context for the spiritual formation and ministerial preparation of the student.</i></p> <p>Application 6 In order to develop the ministerial effectiveness of the student, <i>online graduate-level ministerial training should elevate the formation of the student as a minister of the gospel within the local church over the retention of the student or the knowledge gained by the student.</i></p>

Areas of Further Research

Two areas of further study would be of great service to advance the discussion on the implications of theological anthropology for online pedagogy. The first area of investigation would be to take the application points provided by this dissertation, implement the application points within an institution, and then conduct empirical research on the effectiveness of the online ministerial training. The empirical research could be qualitative research conducted by interviewing administrators within an institution, or quantitative research accomplished by surveying students of the institution about their learning, formation, and ministerial preparedness.

Second, a dissertation on the implications of theological anthropology for online undergraduate Christian education is needed. This dissertation focused on implications and application points for online M.Div. programs, yet many Christian institutions offer online undergraduate programs across a broad liberal arts curriculum. The role of the faculty member, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution should be studied within undergraduate liberal arts programs in order to address the spiritual formation of students within various undergraduate programs.

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ABSTRACT

IMPLICATIONS OF THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY FOR ONLINE PEDAGOGY IN GRADUATE-LEVEL MINISTERIAL TRAINING

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The thesis of this dissertation is that by utilizing a biblical-theological framework, best practices of online graduate-level ministerial training can be presented in such a way that the role of the faculty, the objectives of the classroom, and the purpose of the institution are focused more effectively on the formation of students as ministers of the gospel. It is argued the role of the faculty member should be a model for students to follow, which necessitates institutions prioritize theological competencies ahead of technological and pedagogical competencies when hiring faculty, and institutions prioritize the faculty member's ongoing spiritual formation in the development and evaluation of theological, pedagogical, and technological competencies. In addition, it is argued the objectives of the classroom should be formation-centered, which necessitates the faculty member should utilize social presence within online courses that prioritizes the formation of students over the learning of students, and the faculty member should create community with and among students, beyond social presence, that prioritizes the formation of students over the learning of students. Finally, it is argued the purpose of the institution should focus on the ministerial effectiveness of the student, which necessitates online graduate-level ministerial training should extend beyond the online classroom by utilizing the student's local church context for the spiritual formation and ministerial preparation of the student, and online graduate-level ministerial training should elevate

the formation of the student as a minister of the gospel within the local church over the retention of the student or the knowledge gained by the student.

Chapter 1 introduces the resource, *Best Practices of Online Education: A Guide for Christian Higher Education*, as one of the only resources seeking to present a comprehensive approach to the integration of theology, pedagogy, and technology. Chapter 2 considers how theological anthropology affects pedagogy and concludes with a presentation of David Powlison's Comprehensive Internal model as a biblical-theological framework. Chapters 3 through 5 focus on Powlison's epistemological priorities—articulating biblical truth; critiquing, debunking, and reinterpreting alternative models; and, learning from defective models as it applies to online graduate-level ministerial training.

KEYWORDS: online education, distance education, ministerial training, M.Div., ATS, Association of Theological Schools, Image of God, Imago Dei, human nature, best practices, David Powlison, Mary Lowe, James Estep, Mark Maddix, role of faculty, learning-centered, classroom objectives, theological anthropology, spiritual formation, formation, anthropology

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