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# THE CALL FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN PROTESTANT THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

## ABSTRACT

Spiritual formation is a significant component of the educational work of a theological institution that prepares students for church leadership. Theological institutions have a responsibility to engage students in reflecting on the spiritual life, to provide opportunities for students, to deepen their spiritual journeys and to develop in students a spiritual maturity that is required of future church leaders. This article argues the need for Protestant theological institutions in South Africa to be more deliberate in developing students spiritually within the challenges of their South African context.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The spiritual maturity of future Christian leaders is an important challenge and needs to be addressed throughout theological training. Developing the next generation of quality leaders with good character and vision for the new millennium remains a major concern in church and society. If it is imperative that theological graduates be people of competence and character, then spiritual formation must be as much a part of the agenda as competence and cannot be left to chance. Spiritual formation then must be appreciated as a significant responsibility of the educational work of the theological institution.

Over the last few decades there has been much debate on the nature and place of spiritual formation in Protestant theological institutions (Lindbeck *et al.* 1980; Liefeld & Cannell 1992; Smith 1999; Banks 1999:24-28). The largest body of literature available comes from the growing dissatisfaction with theological education from the 1970s onwards expressed by churches and increasingly

the educators themselves.<sup>1</sup> This has resulted in a new search for a greater emphasis on the spiritual formation of the student (Smith 1999; Jones 2002; Reisz 2003; Banks 1999; Linder 1997; Kretschmar 2006). This new interest in the subject is traceable in the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) North American seminary movement, the Roman Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches affiliated colleges across the world, and the Evangelical Accrediting Movement. Many of these reports and conference papers can be read in various editions of *Theological Education* and since they have not been widely acted on (Cetuk 1998:70-90; Foster *et al.* 2006:370), they form essential reading for today. Much of the literature on the subject of spiritual formation has to do with defining terminology and discussing the wisdom of trying to solve the problem at all.

The term “formation” has a range of meanings in different contexts. The Roman Catholic tradition has a sacramental conception of ministry as priesthood. Formation takes place through the provision of programmes and resources organised around clear institutional goals. A good outline of the history of formation can be found in O’Malley (1992:79-111). The most recent document is the apostolic exhortation of 1992 (*Pastores Dabo Vobis*) which highlights the priest’s fundamental relationship to Jesus Christ and the Church. The exhortation affirms that the mission of the seminary embraces four key dimensions of formation: *human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral*. The *Fourth edition of the program of priestly formation* (1993) highlighted the need for a new emphasis on priestly identity with the insistence that the priesthood is unique in the Church and therefore ought to have its own specialised programmes of learning and formation (Schuth 1999:29).

In Protestant theological institutions formation is more likely to be pursued through individual faculty contributions and extra-curricular activities (Liefeld & Cannell 1992:244; Reisz 2003:29-40). The language of formation used in this context means *spiritual* and *human* formation,<sup>2</sup> though Protestants rarely speak explicitly of human formation. They usually speak of formation in ways that centre in spirituality, but are understood expansively rather than narrowly. Thus Protestant seminaries may use the language of (spiritual) formation to include broadly what Catholic seminaries address separately as *human*

1 Through the early 1970s and into the 1980s, various conferences were convened to study spiritual formation: Babin *et al.* (1972); Edwards (1980); Amirtham (1987); cf. Liefeld and Cannell (1992) for a discussion on the various studies done in Protestant seminaries in the United States.

2 *Human* formation is concerned with discernment of vocation and developmental growth in qualities necessary for effective ministry. *Spiritual* formation concentrates on relationship with God — prayer life, personal faith and spiritual growth in general (Schuth 1999:127).

formation. In the average Protestant theological institution, spiritual formation is now becoming an important area of the mandate. How to meet that need is, however, still a matter of debate (Cannell 2006:35-43; Banks 1999:1-13; Foster *et al.* 2006:101, 274). Disputed issues include the theological and educational status of the field of spiritual formation, the relationship between spiritual formation and other aspects of ministerial education and the form that spiritual formation might take within a programme of studies (Banks 1999:1-13; Jones 2002:56). What one finds in theological institutions instead is that the educational programme favours academic instruction with some practical exposure. It further compartmentalises the spiritual, with spiritual formation happening implicitly, informally and on a personal basis. Effective integration of the three aspects has seldom been achieved (Farley 1983; Wood 1985; Stackhouse 1988; Kelsey 1993; Banks 1999). The common academic pattern, drawn from a university model, continues to be departmentalisation with further specialisation within those departments. The reason for the fragmentation and isolation of disciplines has been a subject of concern in the literature for several years (Farley 1983; Wood 1985; Stackhouse 1988; Kelsey 1993; Banks 1999). The scholastic method further shaped by the Enlightenment has resulted in the study of theology becoming a science supporting the professional training for the ministry. Farley (1983) attributed this situation to the fragmentation of a formerly unified theology. Theology has diversified into practical ministry skills and an aggregate of disciplines which emphasises the cognitive over the spiritual.

In South Africa, after forty years of debate on spiritual formation in the West, very little is known about the intentional practice of spiritual formation in mainline Protestant theological institutions that train students for church leadership. Because a certain type of person is needed to be trained for church leadership with a particular spiritual aptitude or maturity, theological institutions need to take responsibility and become more deliberate in this mandate. Were this practice to be intentional, it would ensure that students actually progress in terms of their understanding and experience of God. It would also lend itself to the development of spiritual and moral leaders who are competent and mature people of integrity — something which is greatly needed in our time in South Africa (Kretschmar 2006:338-361). This article will discuss broadly the challenges and relevance of spiritual formation and how it fits into Protestant theological education; and conclude with research challenges for South Africa.

## 2. WHAT IS SPIRITUAL FORMATION?

Spiritual formation is a lifelong process of becoming, of being formed and developed in the likeness of Christ (Gal. 4:19; Col. 1:28; Rom. 12:2). It is a personal and relational formation which seeks to promote encounter and co-operation with God and society as a whole. Johnson (1989:117) relates the concepts of spiritual formation to transformation which for her means “the formation of Christian

character (that) implies *transformations* of character.” Formation and transformation, processes and turning points, are woven together in the lifelong process of sanctification, of *becoming* Christian, and shaping Christian character.

People are constantly in a process of formation in their families, congregations, faith traditions and through society at large. In this article, the focus is limited to theological formation, the “spiritual shaping” of students over a period of time spent at a theological institution.

Many definitions of spiritual formation abound. One that is helpful to this discussion is found in a World Council of Churches publication that defines spiritual formation as “the intentional processes by which the marks of an authentic Christian spirituality are formed and integrated” (Amirtham & Pryor 1989:17). In this definition certain *processes* are discussed. They allude to processes of spiritual development needed for Christian spirituality to be authentic. Thus Christian spirituality must be *integrated* into the lives of the students and so be observable, whether that be in the classroom, church or society.

Within theological education, spiritual formation is understood as the provision of what is needed to form theological students into people who have the appropriate blend of qualities which will enable them to work effectively in their communities. It encompasses a wide range of competencies and traits. It includes “conversion of mind and heart, fostering integrative thinking, character formation, promoting authentic discipleship, personal appropriation of faith and knowledge, and cultivating a spirituality of the intellectual life” (Lamoureux 1999:142). The scope is often summarised in a triadic “do-be-know”-formula. Terms used to describe the dimensions vary. They include, for example, “to be like Christ, to know the Word of God, and to do the work of ministry” (Chow 1981:2); “cognitive input, psychomotor skills, and affective goals” (Griffiths 1990:13); “academic, technical, and the molding of character and spirituality” (Hwa Yung 1995:4); “acquiring cognitive, spiritual-moral and practical obedience” (Banks 1999:144); and “scholarship, training and piety” (Smith 1999). The expression of these three major dimensions may be summarised as the cognitive acquisition of appropriate knowledge, competence in required ministerial skill and personal character development, which broadly make up spiritual formation in a Protestant theological institution. The major consideration in determining the goal and content of formation is to honour the expectations that the church has of its leaders. At the end of the formation period, educators should be confident that they are recommending worthy candidates for ordination or other church ministries.

It is essential to note the formation of ministerial identity in the conceptualisation of spiritual formation. Westerhoff (1982:155) states that the major weakness of theological education is the emphasis on knowledge and skills rather than on the spiritual development of the priest and the formation of priestly character. He argues that the status as clergy

... lies not in the fact that they are professionals like any other professionals, but that they are *extraordinary* persons. A professional minister may be best defined as someone who has acquired a body of knowledge and developed particular skills; an ordained priest is best defined as a sacramental person.

Holmes (1978) argues a similar position when he claims that a priest is first of all a spiritual person. Such a theological approach to ministry rests upon the validity of its vision of priesthood or ministry. Westerhoff's concept underscores the "apartness" of the priest and contrasts the function of that apartness to professionalisation. A minister formed without recognising the need for an integrated ministerial identity is more likely to succumb to the temptation to approach the ministry as just another job, rather than something that calls upon all of who he or she is.

### 3. CHALLENGES TO THE PRACTICE OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

At the outset it must be stated that the formation of this Christian spiritual life is a precarious task because it touches on the delicate work of the Holy Spirit. Tradition has always revered this work as the source of sanctification, which implies that God alone forms and directs with no need for human cooperation (Chan 1998:56). It should be added, however, that the metaphorical implication of people as lumps of clay, passive and infinitely malleable to the power of some superior shaping force, is problematic. Several reasons make this a tentative topic. "Spiritual formation", being a monastic ideal, was made possible by the vow of obedience taken by every monk in voluntary surrender of personal freedom for the sake of perfection (Colliander 1989:3). Because Protestant devotion to Christian freedom rebels at the domination by one human being over another, spiritual formation in this sense is understood as a subtle manipulation of persons or an attempt to form people to an ideology. This dissent suggests that a preordained pattern or "form" exists to which the most diverse sensibilities and personalities must somehow be "conformed."

The typical Protestant uneasiness with medieval asceticism and spiritual disciplines was also highlighted when Luther and Calvin reacted against Catholic spirituality. Catholics believed that they were being justified only as they were being sanctified (Chan 1998:82), which led to a spirituality that required a progression to perfection through spiritual exercises. Because of this, Lovelace (1990:20) believes that Luther and Calvin may have gone to an extreme in avoiding the use of spiritual exercises for spiritual growth. Hinson (1999:33) states that institutionalising spiritual development within the training of Reformed clergy excessively focused on "methods and techniques that imply a works sal-

vation” which could misconstrue spiritual formation to mean some attempt to find a secret guarantee of salvation.

In considering the challenge of developing a spiritual outlook in theological students (however formed or unformed students may appear to be in their denominational structures), it must be acknowledged that students simultaneously have been formed by other personal, cultural and spiritual forces. Students enter theological institutions deeply rooted in family traditions and local, regional subcultures. They have been influenced by values of advertising and popular culture and have internalised prevailing views on race, gender, social and economic class and religious diversity. Theological educators have noted that students may resist or subvert those faculty intentions for their spiritual and professional formation that challenge their beliefs and traditions, compounding this challenge (Foster *et al.* 2006:103). This may allude to the training and competencies of those responsible for “forming”, and raises issues of hierarchies of relationships and potential abuses of power.

Another pedagogical challenge is the task of helping many students to outgrow their naïve, pre-critical, sentimental or fundamentalist piety with which they have entered the seminary into what philosopher of religion Paul Ricoeur (1980:8) called the “second naïveté.” Students would then hopefully “move from being people of naïve, unquestioning belief to critical faith.” Rather than having their existential grasp of the tradition broadened and deepened, theological students often perceive that their teachers are out to deprive them of their piety. They respond either by allowing this to happen, and drifting into some sort of cynicism, or by constructing a protective shell around their faith so as to prevent theological education from penetrating their own convictions and practices. Furthermore theological educators find it difficult to ground students deeply enough in a religious tradition for it to be truly “formative” in the face of conflicting cultural and societal values, and, at the same time, to engage them to reflect on truths in other religious traditions (Foster *et al.* 2006:102). Despite this widely shared goal, the degree of openness seen as desirable in approaching the beliefs and practices of “others” varies widely from denomination to denomination and in different theological institutions.

The above make up some of the challenges to spiritual formation within a theological institution. Other challenges are that in many Protestant institutions there is still little impetus for adopting an emphasis on spiritual formation that educators feel is difficult to quantify and almost impossible to programme effectively (Reisz 2003:30); and institutional and curricular forms do not easily accommodate the mysteries of the Christian faith. The faculty feel that they are not rewarded academically for modelling spirituality; educators feel that if they spend too much time being spiritual mentors, they could suffer academically and their career progress might be jeopardised (Senior & Weber 1994:32). There are also concerns of how to reconcile formation as a corporate term

with the functional, individualistic cast of theological curricula and outcomes. Attempting formation in an intercultural community (Linder 1997) has its challenges of ethnocentrism and prejudice, and formation processes must take the personal and contextual into account with equal seriousness.

The most pressing challenge to spiritual formation is the consensus of contemporary literature that theological education is in a crisis (Banks 1999:1-13; Cannell 2006:35-43; Paver 2006:7-15). The problem is that theological institutions have failed to produce the desired product, skilled leaders. Or the purpose of theology is not understood<sup>3</sup> and therefore the theological curriculum is in disarray with minimal integration among the disciplines and with a tendency to functionalism.<sup>4</sup> Whether the purpose of theological education is understood as the nature of theology, the church, Christian witness or professional ministry, it still represents only a limited perspective on theological education, despite the advantages of each. The reform of theological education as integrated education will require that the whole faculty address together the conceptual problem of what pieces of study and action might reconstitute *theologia* as the deep formative understanding of God. Clearly, the purpose of theological education that is foremost in a theological institution will shape the nature and content of the curriculum and have implications for the practice of spiritual formation within this educational structure.

#### 4. THE NEED FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Interest in spiritual formation has grown in recent years, with the preparation and shaping of future church leaders as the most obvious need. An essential and most distinctive capacity of church leadership is to address the spiritual dimension of human life and experience. Church leaders are routinely expected to exercise this capacity in ordinary actions and rituals such as teaching, preaching,

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3 The literature presents various perspectives as to the purpose of theological education: nature and reform of theology to restore the unity of theology (Farley 1983); the mission and purpose of the church (Hough & Cobb 1985); the development of vision and discernment in theology (Wood 1985); professional image of ministry (Glasse 1988); pluralism and globalisation facing church leaders (Stackhouse 1988); the nature of Christian witness (Kelsey 1992); and the missional model (Banks 1999).

4 Farley's *Theologia* (1983:29-124) argues that the standard theological curriculum is a haphazard collection of studies handed down from earlier periods and now entrenched in separate academic guilds. The pieces cannot be fit together from any vantage point because the disciplines we have now were never part of the larger whole in the first place. What once held theological study together has been lost, that is *theologia* (a sapiential knowledge of God which disposes the knower to God and deeply informs the knower for Christian life and ministry). Theology as "habitus of wisdom" has shifted to a "clerical paradigm."

leading liturgy and even conversing. Church leaders must be sensitive to and be able to skilfully deal with people's questions, fears and hopes about the ultimate meaning of their lives and experiences. They must sense which aspects of their religious tradition might best provide resources for healing or liberation; they must know how to be prophetic in given situations and how to frame appropriate responses for changing situations and circumstances in congregations and communities. How are church leaders prepared to exercise this capacity?

Theological students need to become aware that ministry in the form of ministerial leadership is a public and not a private role. Consequently students must attune to the issue of behaviour and accountability required of those who enjoy the community's trust. One might identify a number of relatively distinct needs in this connection. Ministers and those in similar positions of leadership need to know themselves well (Conn 1994:23). Leadership in general is full of temptations. The professional roles occupied by such church leaders in our society give ample opportunity for various kinds of abuse.<sup>5</sup> Self-deception, as well as the deception of others, is an easy and attractive feature of religious leadership. Misuse of time and resources, manipulation of others by means of one's professional knowledge and power, and other forms of depravity are possible. These are also often subtly encouraged by the social arrangements in which leaders find themselves and the psychological dynamics of the situation (Conn 1994:23). There will also be particular demands upon the leader's spirituality. As teachers of the tradition, leaders are expected to know whereof they speak, and this demands some sort of internalisation of the tradition and competence in the living out of its resources (Rice 1998:34-35). If they are to provide leadership to congregations and individuals under all sorts of conditions, they must understand human behaviour in health and adversity. This requires some degree of psychological, anthropological and sociological understanding, as well as a theological grasp of the human condition before God (Van der Ven 1998:171). It also requires insight and penetration and a multitude of other personal qualities, which finally rest upon one's self-knowledge and on the character of one's spiritual life. Students preparing for such work must be well acquainted with their own strengths and weaknesses when faced by such challenges, and with the opportunities that this affords for genuine and effective service. In these and other ways, the responsibilities of church leadership call for a particular sort of spiritual maturity.

The growing interest in spiritual formation points to other needs within the theological institution. In recent years even denominational theological institutions can no longer guarantee that new students are already being formed within a particular religious tradition or culture (Senior & Weber 1994:30). The dislocation of traditional family life and the decline in church participation among

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5 For a discussion on power issues amongst African leaders, see Kretschmar (2002:58).

many young people, particularly in mainline denominations, result in many students having little or no sense of the history, customs and ethos of the religious communities that they feel called to serve and lead. Previously, most students came to theological schools at least partly formed in and by families and local congregations. But in many cases this is no longer true (Senior & Weber 1994:30). Theological schools are thus being forced to do what used to be done in other places by other people. The theological institute cannot substitute for the family, the clinic or the church itself. Nevertheless, it may have to take increasing responsibility for the personal and spiritual development of the student whom it is preparing for public ministry. This concern is related to reports that interpersonal and relational deficits are associated with the vast majority of psychological and spiritual problems faced by pastors (Hall 1997:240-253).

Spiritual formation is now also viewed as necessary in theological schools because of the changing demographics of student bodies (Cetuk 1998; Paver 2006). Many candidates for ministry are older students who bring a potential for increasing maturity and the possibility of a longer, more complex web of personal experiences and psychological baggage. These students also bring with them some of the marks of current culture: unstable and broken families, experimentation with alcohol, drugs and sexuality; the strengths and weaknesses of living in a materialistic, competitive and highly individualistic culture and so on. These facts have been documented in a number of recent studies.<sup>6</sup>

Spiritual formation is also more urgent than it used to be because of the growing awareness of professional misconduct by some clergy. Many people in churches hold theological institutions at least in part responsible for such scandalous failures. They demand that institutions do a better job of screening clergy candidates and give more priority to the teaching of ethical values in their curricula. Member schools of the Association of Theology Schools (ATS), for example, have been sued over the misconduct of their graduates (Senior & Weber 1994:32). Such criticisms raise the issue of standards for admission and readiness for ministry.

## 5. THE THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTION AS THE CONTEXT OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION

A “theological institution”, referring to a theological college, seminary or Bible college, exists primarily to train people for some form of church leadership and full-time work in a congregation or local Christian community. Most often students are expected to come with a level of personal commitment to the stated

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6 A study of Roman Catholic seminaries by Hemrick and Walsh (1993); broad study of Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic seminaries by Larsen and Shopshire (1988).

belief system of the institution and are there to be equipped professionally and frequently vocationally. This is in contrast to theological education at a public or secular university where studies are open to anyone for serious inquiry typically pursued in the humanities or social sciences. Universities are concerned primarily with the development of critical and research-based scholarship. In this context theological studies are not necessarily equated with theological belief; there may be little advocacy for a particular stance, and there may be neither specific requirement for, nor expectation of, a personal commitment to the belief system being studied by either student or teacher. Issues of spiritual development or formation are not part of the remit.

Spiritual formation in a theological institution requires an understanding of what constitutes a theological school and of what belongs to its mission. Some institutions stress theological education with the intent to develop students' aptitude for theological inquiry, whatever the students' vocational aims may be. Other institutions stress theological education with the aim of preparing leaders for the church. This second sense is the focus of this article. Therefore theological education will be coordinated with other types of education that pertain to qualification for church leadership.

In what ways then do theological institutions cultivate the knowledge and skills, and nurture the outlook, associated with the spiritual dimensions of church leadership? In carrying out the responsibility for spiritual formation, theological institutions differ considerably amongst themselves with regard both to their explicit intentions and to their actual accomplishments. The more ecumenical a theological institution is, the more difficult it is to define spiritual formation (Linder 1997). For instance, there are not only many different denominational and theological perspectives in South African seminaries but also an increasing presence of African students from the continent whose experiences and perspectives were previously ignored. To take all perspectives seriously requires openness to different approaches to and meanings of Christian spirituality and to the challenges of how this can be achieved. In denominational institutions, notions of spiritual formation vary widely from discipleship to inculturation into a particular liturgical or confessional tradition. Other institutions are church-based and conduct spiritual formation for their students on behalf of the church, as a part of the students' ongoing Christian education. Some institutions are a combination of these various features and are consequently pulled in various directions.

Considering the increasing pluralism, the inter-confessional and intercultural mix, theological institutions need to ask what goals should orientate the practice of theological education and what shape its practice should take. Theological institutions then need to specify what they mean by the term "spiritual formation" and how it fits into their own distinctive mission. For instance, it was found through an investigation of spiritual formation in evangelical Protestant

theological institutions in South Africa that there was generally a lack of clarity about institutional goals (Naidoo 2005:148) which negatively influenced the practice of formation. Many theological institutions were frustrated in their efforts to develop a plan for spiritual formation within their theological offerings because of a lack of consensus on the goal and means of this formation.

It is pertinent here to ask the question: What *is* the role of spiritual formation in education for church leadership? Firstly, a religious leader should be well formed in the capacities and outlook belonging to the tradition with a certain kind of spiritual aptitude as discussed earlier. Secondly, a leader should be well formed in the tradition by developing an aptitude for theology, and becoming a competent participant in theological inquiry. That is, one must know how the key concepts of the tradition fit together, for example God, grace, sin and creation. Theological education, then, involves a deliberate broadening and deepening of one's own experience of the Christian "thing" (Kelsey 1992:9).

There is also a sense in which theological education is requisite to spiritual formation. An aptitude for critical reflection on the Christian faith pertains to Christian spiritual maturity (Wood 1985). To be willing and able to trust in God more than in one's own beliefs about God and to see theology as a means to ongoing repentance and renewal, is to have grasped something of its spiritual significance. This process of acquiring theological aptitude is one factor in the process of growth toward spiritual maturity. Correspondingly, one is unlikely to develop and sustain an aptitude for theological reflection if one has not developed the spiritual resources that make it possible to live with and even welcome the challenges it brings. Theological education, however, should not become solely spiritual formation either. It involves spiritual formation, but in order to develop a mature faith this must include a critical re-evaluation of belief. For Wood (1991:22), most crucial to the overall function of leadership is the student's capacity to think with and on behalf of the tradition. He suggests that a student who is simply indoctrinated into the tradition and who appropriates it uncritically is probably a poor candidate for a position of genuine leadership. At the same time, a leader who is not well formed in the tradition is likely to be ineffective irrespective of the abilities for critical reflection she or he may possess. What is needed then is a combination of thorough internalisation and critical perspective which may be best produced by developing a closer partnership between institutions of theology and churches. Students must learn first-hand how communities work and develop the skill and experience of reflecting on the dynamics of the Christian tradition.

Spiritual formation in theological institutions involves a variety of methods which are not methodological in the sense that they "produce" the type of spirituality one desires or effectively guarantee certain "results" which afterward can be measured like intellectual abilities. Taking into account the fact that each person already has a certain kind of spirituality, different methods of spiritual formation are conceived as helping each person to discover and be

transformed to manifest the marks of true Christian spirituality. If a variety of means are not found through which spiritual formation of students can deliberately be pursued, it may not take place at all. These methods could include courses on spirituality, instruction in personal spiritual disciplines, counselling services, community life, small-group work, psychometric and psychological testing, classroom teaching, spiritual direction, the curriculum, personal mentoring and personal development interviews, chapel and worship service, field-work exposure, in-service training and vocational development. For example, in the classroom, spiritual formation will not be the explicit agenda of many of the courses because it is approached more easily indirectly than directly. But in certain ways even the predominant mood, the learning climate and the relationship between teachers and students contribute to the overall process of spiritual formation and can have deep consequences for personal and communal spirituality. Important for spiritual learning is a participatory learning style (Palmer 1998) which allows the direct and full involvement of students in the learning process. This expanded notion of theological teaching assumes that teachers have received formal training in pedagogical methods. So *how* teachers teach may be just as crucial in the formative process as *what* they teach (Johnson 1989:135). The quality, style and personal values of a good theological institution must actively support its curriculum and spiritual formation. At the same time the curriculum should be understood not as an accumulation of courses but as an overall process of critical reflection and *integration* (Lamoureux 1999:143). This calls for a common understanding of the purpose of theological education among the various disciplines and departments. Attention should also be given to the hidden curriculum (Pazmino 1992:93) that generates trust or mistrust and openness or closedness in a classroom community.

Much of the legitimate criticism of theological institutions' spiritual aridity (Reisz 2003:30) will be dissipated when educators can become intentional about creating "safe spaces" to help students explore issues of their own faith formation and spiritual lives in tandem with their academic work. When spiritual practices fostered in the above ways reinforce or function with one another, they contribute to linking the development of spiritual practices with developing a ministerial identity of students in an easier way.

It must be noted that the role of the institution in spiritual formation must not be overstated. The theological institution is not responsible for the whole of the student's formation. The local church has a vital part to play in this process but the student is ultimately responsible for his or her own spiritual growth. The theological institution should provide the structures and opportunities for spiritual growth, but ultimately it is the student's responsibility to respond to these opportunities.

## 6. RESEARCH CHALLENGES

Many Protestant theological institutions in South Africa have in their mission statements the goal of developing and nurturing students of godly character to serve God and society. These institutions market themselves by emphasising their unique characteristics which may include the integration of faith and learning through a tight-knit, caring community, faculty members with a Christian worldview, an emphasis on character development, service and ministry, or a general focus on holistic student development. However, it is unclear how well institutions have accomplished and assessed this goal. At the moment, apart from incidental and unscholarly reports, very little is known about the spiritual formation programmes in theological institutions in South Africa; and there is no comprehensive picture of how the goal of developing mature and godly students through Christian institutions is implemented. Historically, one of the main purposes of Christian higher education has been to develop godly young people of character to serve God through obedience to God's calling and faithfulness to their vocations. Research needs to be conducted to understand theological students' lived experience of God, to consider whether students perceive theological institutions to have a positive influence on their spirituality and to clarify the phenomenon of Christian spiritual formation in all its multiplicity.

Different studies in the United States have attempted to measure spiritual maturity and the level of achievement of stated missions in Christian higher education institutions (Bayliss 1997; Astin 1993; Birkholz 1997). Studies on the impact of institutions have focused on the cognitive, moral and psychological aspects (Astin 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini 1996). Some have focused mainly on religious and moral values or attitudinal outcomes (Bayliss 1997; Feldman & Newcomb 1994) or moral and ego development (Loxley & Whiteley 1986). In spite of the emphasis on the whole person in student development, more attention needs to be focused on spiritual development (Harris 2003; Smith 1999; Hall 1997).

In assessing the Christian college impact on spiritual formation, development theories (Fowler 1984; Erickson 1982; Groeschel 1984; Chickering & Reisser 1993), more than the others, can provide support for research and practice in this subject. These theories focus on characteristics unique to students in their developmental stages and spiritual development. Parks (1986) has emphasised the responsibilities and roles of individuals and institutional leadership in helping students find meaning in identity. The content and structures of Christianity are both essential for the individual to develop an understanding of the relationships between self, community and God and for developing character and morality that help them to become better leaders. Parks (2000) has highlighted the profound effects of mentoring individuals, and the importance of mentoring cultures and environments in higher education.

The significance of this kind of research is that, given the importance of developing students' spirituality and the lack of empirical studies in spirituality in South Africa, research of this nature could enable institutions to develop strategies for improving the quality of theological education and the quality of church leadership by producing graduates of personal maturity, integrity and authentic spirituality who would truly be "the salt and the light" in dealing with the challenges of South African society.

## 7. CONCLUSION

This article has presented the importance of intentional spiritual formation within the theological institution. A theological institution's success or failure ought to be measured by how well the interrelation between beliefs and practices is articulated, forming students to see their study, prayer and service as a complex yet integrated whole. Spiritual formation in this case is not simply a goal among others, but a permeation of all educational goals. From this perspective, studying theology is a God-centred event here and now. Any suggestion that real life and real work will take place *after* one studies theology makes theology into something it is not — a tool to be used in work not yet done. Theological education is also not about simply conveying information or knowledge. Knowledge is important but theological education has a greater task of shaping ministerial identity which requires attention to the care and nurture of souls. It ought to include constructive "formative" experiences that open up the tradition to students in ways they have not previously attained. This requires particular gifts on the part of the faculty, that is particular insights about teaching and learning as well as a conducive environment. When different methods for cultivating spirituality are aligned in an intentional way, the effect will be powerful.

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