
Preface

The theological and educational perspectives expressed in these collected essays draw upon our varying experiences in theological education and our continuing learning in *The Lexington Seminar: Theological Teaching for the Church's Ministries*, a project supported by Lilly Endowment Inc. and sponsored by Lexington Theological Seminary.

At the heart of *The Lexington Seminar* is the relationship between the purposes of theological education and the institutional contexts in which these purposes are embodied in the seminary as a community of faith and learning. Each year since 1999, we have invited five theological faculties to become part of the Seminar. To date, thirty-five seminaries have joined the project. The schools have been primarily denominational seminaries committed to theological education that prepares leaders for the church.

In selecting these schools, we have tried to identify institutions that have demonstrated academic integrity, are stable enough to focus on this project in a sustained way, and are constituted of faculty and administrators who are committed to collaborative work to improve teaching and learning. Further, we have invited schools that are varied in denominational relationships and theological commitments, because we feel that calling together this kind of diverse community draws forth a lively conversation in which the significant questions of a student's learning, a professor's teaching, and a school's mission may be addressed.

THE SEMINAR PROCESS

After accepting an invitation to participate in the Seminar, the seminary deans spend a year working with their faculties to develop a narrative that expresses the kinds of questions in theological teaching and learning that most concern them. (See the process flowchart.) These narratives are brief stories that illustrate educational challenges confronting a school. Anyone who has been around institutions very long knows that the stories currently circulating in the life of the school provide a description of the school's reality that is difficult to summarize in any formal document. In fact, as Wayne Booth once suggested, "The life of any institution depends on the stories its members can bring themselves to tell each other" (1988, 13).¹ Moreover, the stories we tell always reveal more than we think we know. In discussing these narratives with colleagues from other theological schools, their meaning takes on new texture and significance, and unexpected avenues into understanding are often discovered. Readers who wish to gather a complete view of this lore should go to the Archives section of the Seminar's Web site—<http://www.lexingtonseminar.org/>—where all of the narratives may be found.

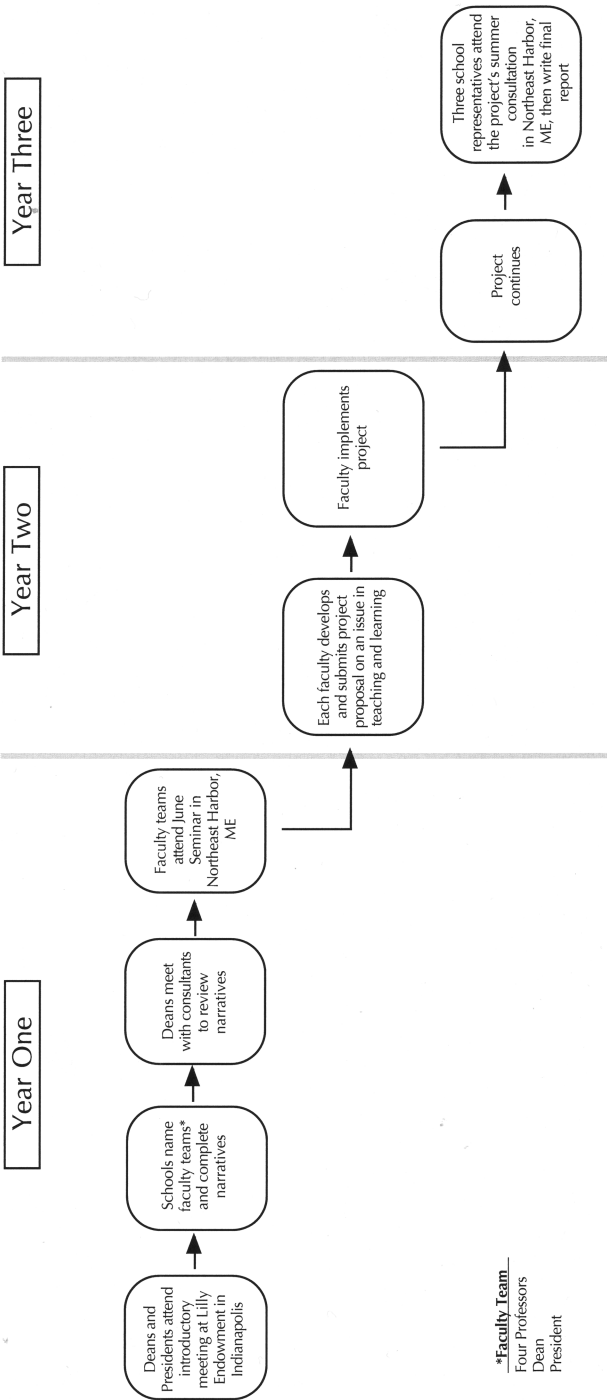
In June, a team from each of the five schools comes to Northeast Harbor, Maine, for a five-day conference focused on the narratives. The teams are composed of the president, the dean, and four members of the faculty. At this summer seminar, participants discuss the five schools' narratives, meet as teams, worship together, and have time for renewal. The seminar itself is constructed intentionally to provide the time and space needed to promote evocative conversation and reflection. School teams are encouraged to be together in ways that are not possible during the regular academic year.

Through the critical discussions of the June Seminar we seek to

- Affirm the teaching ministry of theological educators,
- Raise up and discern the diverse ways in which issues of teaching and learning present themselves in institutional contexts,
- Evoke new perspectives on the challenges facing individual schools, and
- Encourage faculty to make conversations about teaching and learning a crucial part of faculty life.

In focusing on the narratives prepared by each school, the June Seminar is an occasion for reflecting on the underlying assumptions and perspectives that illuminate issues in theological teaching and learning. It is a place where colleagues can learn from one another, both in gaining a wider sense of the issues that affect theological teaching and in gaining insight into a particular educational issue or concern that each school faces.

THE LEXINGTON SEMINAR PROCESS



*Faculty Team—
 Four Professors
 Dean
 President

Following the June Seminar, the seminary teams refine the issue in teaching and learning which they have identified in their narratives and now want to address in an educational project over the next two years. While it is the responsibility of the team to do the initial work, the whole faculty in each institution is expected to be involved in selecting and designing the project itself.

From available studies on teaching, we recognize that the process of transformation involves the creation of a setting that allows for critical reflection and the emergence of principles that may shape educational projects. In this regard, implementing the Seminar projects and reflecting on their significance have often assisted faculties in taking additional initiatives to identify and address issues in teaching and learning. The final reports on the schools' projects that have been completed to date may be found in the Archives section of the Seminar's Web site (<http://www.lexingtonseminar.org/>).

THE COLLECTED ESSAYS

Although the writers have drawn upon a wide range of literature and experience regarding theological education, the essays in *Practical Wisdom*² refer often to the primary issues reflected in the schools' narratives and projects. At the time the essays were being written, only the narratives from 1999–2002 had been completed, so only those narratives were available for use as source material. Even though not every one of the narratives is referenced specifically in this book, every narrative did indeed inform the discussion of the issues.

Organized into three parts, the chapters provide ways of

- Rethinking the changing work and calling of theological teachers,
- Understanding the context of change in which theological schools now live, and
- Addressing the practical effort that has to be undertaken to deal with the challenges that schools face.

In all the chapters, the aim is to provide thoughtful perspectives on the issues and the practical implications for theological teaching and learning.

The writers of these essays represent the spectrum of theological traditions and cannot be pigeonholed into any one perspective. While we have tried to maintain a common tone to the whole book, we have at the same time tried to express the kind of diverse interpretations that characterize the Seminar itself. While there is a shared understanding of many topics addressed, the various points of view demonstrate a healthy unwillingness to conform to constricting unanimity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are deeply grateful for the support of Lilly Endowment Inc., which has made possible The Lexington Seminar. The counsel and friendship of Craig R. Dykstra, Vice President for Religion, and John R. Wimmer, Program Director for Religion, continue to be crucial to all that we do. From the beginning and throughout the development of the project, Fred L. Hofheinz, former Program Director for Religion, was of singular significance in his guidance of the Seminar's purpose and program. In this regard, he made possible connections with The Keystone Conference: Theological Teaching for the Church's Ministries, which was created for Roman Catholic theological schools and led by Vincent Cushing, OFM, and Kevin O'Neil, CSsR, who were generous in their assistance as we developed The Lexington Seminar.

Lexington Theological Seminary has been the sponsoring institution for The Lexington Seminar, and for this hospitality we are very appreciative. Throughout its history, the seminary has been an institution known for its lively intellectual mission and for the service it has rendered in the education of leaders for the church.

We are also indebted to the significant editorial work of Kenneth Huggins. His attention to detail and his thoughtful recommendations throughout the writing and editing of the essays have been invaluable.

Finally, we want to express appreciation to the schools that have been part of the Seminar. The commitment that faculties, deans, and presidents have brought to this project has been significant for the whole enterprise of theological education.

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2004



NOTES

1. All references may be found at the back of the book in the section entitled, “References and Recommended Reading.”
2. The title came to mind based on comments made by Wendell Berry during a conference called “The Future of Agrarianism: *The Unsettling of America* Twenty-Five Years Later” (2002), organized by Norman Wirzba and sponsored by Georgetown College to discuss the significance of Berry’s writings and ideas. In the context of these collected issues, I take “practical wisdom” to mean knowledge expressed in action, guided by a sense of faithful integrity, and oriented toward service—the good that may be done.

