

Conversations

Should We Be Teaching the Historical Critical Method?

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Abstract. *This manuscript is an edited transcript of a panel discussion held at a Society of Biblical Literature conference (Boston, Massachusetts, November 22 to 24, 2008). Alice Hunt begins the discussion by summarizing the content and significance of a new book by Dale Martin, *The Pedagogy of The Bible* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) in which he argues that biblical studies in seminaries and divinity schools give too much emphasis to teaching the historical critical method and not enough to preparing students for ministry by teaching them to be self-reflective practitioners of the improvisational skills of interpreting scripture. Then a panel of bible scholars, including the author, conduct a wide-ranging discussion that raises questions about how biblical studies might better prepare students for ministry, as well as the proper role and appropriate pedagogies for introducing biblical studies in the undergraduate liberal arts curriculum.*

Alice Hunt, *Chicago Theological Seminary*: My task this afternoon is to provide a fair introduction to and overview of the book, *Pedagogy of the Bible: An Analysis and Proposal*, by Dale B. Martin, published by Westminster John Knox Press in an attempt provide a platform for our discussion about pedagogy.

Dale Martin is a former professor of New Testament at Duke and now the Woolsey Professor of Religious Studies at Yale. I appreciate Dale's naming of his own context at the outset of the book: a church person who came up in a bible-oriented, fundamentalist, church – he “knew” the bible – he won sword drills (some of us know about “sword drills”) . . . And, in honor of Dale, and many of our colleagues who encourage us *all* to name our contexts – my context is, in that case, quite similar to Dale's – I too did my share of sword drills. Much of my own research and passion developed out of a similar bible-oriented context. And another piece of my context – I love Martin's book!

While the face of this book would lend one to think it is about teaching the bible, the heart of the book is really about theological education. Martin provides a provocation, a wake-up call, for theological educators across this country – presidents, deans, faculties – and, at least as importantly, congregational leaders and laity. Martin accomplishes several tasks in this single volume. He claims his main purpose as one of offering an intervention: in doing so, he examines the current state of pedagogy of bible in the curricula of theological education; he defines and analyzes historical criticism as it func-

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tions in and dominates the teaching of the bible; reflects on the meaning of Scripture; considers interpretation and the creation of meaning; and discusses ideas and new ways to teach bible. From the outset, the reader of this text easily conjures a picture of Dale B. Martin, puzzled look on his face, scratching his head in wonder, saying – something is not working here – asking – why? Why do we continue to teach in this unproductive way? Martin visited ten theological schools, interviewing forty-eight faculty members and fifty students. What he learned will probably surprise none of us here. What he suggests should move us all to action.

He examines the current state of teaching bible in theological curricula – curricula that have remained static for some time. He notes the presence of biblical studies in the beginning semesters of the curriculum. And he notes a perhaps now distant past when faculty could assume biblical literacy on the part of incoming students. But Martin's main assessment has to do with the pervasive primacy of historical criticism in the totality of biblical pedagogy. He defines historical criticism as taking “the primary meaning of the text to be what its meaning would have been in its original context” (3) – “either the intentions of the author or the meaning understood by the ancient audience” (4) which “must be anchored in the social and cultural realities of the ancient context of the text's production and reception” (4). While we might choose to have discussions about the full definition of historical criticism, Martin's point must not be lost. We (and here “we” means the academy, church, and the public square) have, intentionally or unintentionally, equated historical criticism with meaning, which we have equated with reality, normativity, and truth. And while we should at some point talk about how this came to be – as so aptly prompted by the work of Burke Long in *Planting and Reaping Albright* (Penn State University Press, 1997) – now is not that time.

The methodological actions and assumptions, then, of historical criticism include focus on original languages and sources, viewing the bible as a collection of material written by various “human” people over long periods of time. Historical criticism assumes “the meaning” is available – and – if properly “excavated” – capital T truth will be revealed.

Other methods are employed in academia today – Martin names literary, feminist, and social scientific criticism – and calls readings from these places “perspectivism.” We have only to look at the Society of Biblical Literature conference program book for an analysis of how we define our discipline: what we understand as historical criticism – what the Biblical Colloquium established as normative, in academia, churches, and the public square – is without appellation – and is the unnamed core. But it is neither really “unnamed” nor the “core”.

Martin suggests biblical scholars have become gatekeepers, forming a fence around historical criticism. He asks us to think about what is at stake with theological education set up in the schema of the classical disciplines, with each generation more insular than its predecessor. What philosopher Lewis Gordon calls “disciplinary decadence” leading to ossification, Martin names as “disciplinary inertia within the field of biblical scholarship as a whole and the way it trains future seminary professors” (15). He encourages instead that religious leaders be trained “to enter public debates with sophistication, equipped with the honed tools of contemporary interpretation theory” (17). He argues that we are not providing appropriate theological education if we do not rigorously educate religious leaders to think critically and theologically in self-reflective ways. He calls for an intentional examination of the “typical” curriculum

containing hierarchical divisions, forcing biblical studies to stand-alone and at the beginning of the curriculum.

Martin presses us to consider the challenges faced with the dominance of historical criticism. Even in the metaphors used to present biblical interpretation, our pedagogy has become relaxed and probably a bit sloppy. Take the metaphor of a biblical interpretation as a “container” for example: the student is to unpack or pull out meaning – the “True” meaning. Or what of the metaphor of text as “human agent”: the text “speaks,” and the student should “be passive as possible, listen as carefully and objectively as possible, and try to avoid distorting the utterance” (30). Both metaphors carry a myth of objectivity, allowing humanity to abdicate responsibility. And, according to Martin, “the problem with these images of text and meaning is that they are metaphors that become accepted as realities” which “gives people the false impression that texts can control their own interpretation” (30). Even though scholars have theoretically released this notion of control, thanks in part to the works of the likes of Stanley Fish and Jonathan Culler, somehow that release has not translated into curricular activity, and rarely into our communities of faith and the public square.

So Martin calls the academy to acknowledge and to teach *how* texts have meaning. He uses the delightful example of how some scholars try inadequately to dismiss theories of interpretations: everyone knows perfectly well what the letters STOP mean when we see them on a stop sign. Says Martin,

Of course, if I am driving a motorized vehicle and come to such a sign, read the letters, and stop my vehicle, I do show that I take the text to mean, “This is a command to stop your vehicle here, look for other traffic, and proceed only when you have the right-of-way as defined by local traffic laws.” In that case, that is the meaning of the text. But what if the high school boy shows up in the middle of the night, steals the sign, and hangs it up in his bedroom? If I see the sign in his bedroom, would I still think there it also means that I am supposed to stop my vehicle at the foot of his bed. Or let’s say that the sign is hung on the wall of the Museum of Modern Art. (33)

Martin’s example continues, but you get the idea.

Martin’s reflection on interpretation provides a beautiful piece on the creative exchange and energy of life as he encourages us to “observe the reading activity.”

When I look at spots on a page – a text, I am of course looking at something, and the spots on this page may not be the same as the spots on another page. I am not making meaning out of nothing. I am reacting to something that is really there. But the problem with many people’s assumptions when they oppose the self to the text as two different entities is that they assume that the self is a stable thing and that in order to be changed it must be changed by some other agent that can dispense meaning. But the self is no such stable entity . . . It is not the inanimate text that is the agent of change; the process of interpretation we ourselves are practicing changes us. (35–6)

And lest you fear anarchy and chaos at the thought of such lack of control, Martin reminds us that it is community that provides structure and control. “The meanings of words are products of social consensus,” he says (37).

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Further exploring meaning, Martin claims that historiography, in fact, cannot confirm or deny reality, nor can it prove meaning. And anyway, Martin reminds us, by providing examples from Origen, Augustine, Venerable Bede, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Thomas Aquinas, the supremacy and necessity of historical criticism is relatively recent. Centuries of biblical interpretation created meaning without historical criticism. Those who came before help us see that people of faith can read texts and create meaning without fear and necessity of finding *the right* meaning.

If these arguments are not effective enough, Martin takes it to a new level, proclaiming the need for *adult* theology. He asks: why is it that we see maturation as a good thing in every part of life except religion? When we were ten years old, we understood “good guys” and “bad guys” as clear and polar opposites. With maturity comes nuance. Such organic growth continues throughout life. And yet, why do adult Christians continue to be satisfied with second grade Sunday school answers and definitions of meaning? He brings to mind a biblical text: when I was a child . . .”

Martin pushes us to think intentionally about what it means to learn to interpret the bible theologically. He suggests the first step is to “make explicit what one thinks scripture is” (74). He offers a helpful suggestion:

I have experimented with thinking of Scripture as a space we enter rather than a bookish source for knowledge. We should imagine Scripture, in my suggestions, as something like a museum or a sanctuary, perhaps a cathedral. Just as we enter a museum and experience both its building and its art as communicating to us – yet without any explicit rules or propositions being heard in the air – so we should imagine that when we enter the space of Scripture by reading it alone or hearing it read in church we are entering a space where our Christian imaginations may be informed, reshaped, even surprised by the place Scripture becomes for us. (80)

He gives examples of some methods for teaching theological interpretation: Walter Wilson’s use of the Wesleyan quadrilateral, Charles Cosgrove’s five hermeneutical rules, and Jack Roger’s guidelines. He offers some other examples:

One could well teach the doing of theology, I believe, by means of a rather simple method. Or, I should say, the method is simple to describe but complicated to practice. One could teach students how to do theology simply by beginning with any statement of faith – say, a statement from a creed, such as “Christ descended into hell” – and ask students to demonstrate, using different resources from Christian Scripture, tradition, their own experiences, commonsense notions shared with others, or whatever, how the statement could be considered Christianly true. But then, in my view, it is just as important to ask them to construct an account explaining how the statement is or could be false, using the same resources. From a traditional Christian point of view, one I share, every statement a human being can make, especially about God or theology, is true only “in a sense.” And every statement is or can be false “in a sense.” A statement is true or false depending on how it is taken, how it is interpreted. (88)

But perhaps my favorite part of the book is Martin’s presentation of interpretation as improvisation. When a fledging musician first begins to learn jazz, the work is difficult. Five-note scales in all keys must be rehearsed and memorized to the point they flow

smoothly from the fingers. Small pieces of music, stringing together the notes of these chords, are played over and over again until they spring from the fingers without a thought, so that the playing becomes better without thought – second nature. Only then is the musician able to perform improvisation. Improvisation, then, allows and even expects freedom – within established boundaries and conventions. And these boundaries and conventions depend both on jazz and on the context in which the improvisation is played. “The difference,” Martin says, “between a bad improvisation and a good one depends on a balance of freedom and creativity within the boundaries of acceptable musical forms” (86). Martin suggests that perhaps we are adequate in our biblical pedagogy with the initial imitation piece but that we neglect to teach the theoretical interpretation piece.

As he bemoans our inability as professors to find new ways to teach, Martin acknowledges our tendency to teach others as we have been taught. He does show initial signs of hope: he presents ideas from several faculty about how we could better teach bible, including the promotion of interdisciplinary teaching (although I believe administrators will have to create still non-existent structures that reward interdisciplinarity if this avenue is to thrive). One person suggested training congregations instead of pastors. Another wanted to discard disciplines and set up theological education as a social form of collegium. Still another suggested a year-round topic for each year’s curricula. Some wanted to see a focus on teaching basic theological and critical thinking first, before moving to Bible and history of interpretation.

Martin, if perhaps too shyly, floats the idea of making Scripture central to the curriculum of theological education. He paints a picture of a radically different curriculum for theological education (calling Edward Farley to my mind by his creativity and breadth of thought). Martin urges us to come away from our disciplinary silos and place Bible at the center of the curriculum. Doing so will allow us to “reclaim the premodern heritage . . . because that would better connect us to the longer history and traditions of the church” (98). Another reason: “We may be better able to break out of the captivity of Scripture to modernity and historical criticism. . . . and remove it from the exclusive control of specialists or experts of biblical studies” (98).

Martin’s assumptions are clear: (1) historical criticism should be taught, but as one way of reading among many; (2) maintain disciplinary distinctness and expertise, but integrate them and use them “in conjunction”; (3) teach theology prior to teaching methods of interpreting scripture; (4) and then, with regard to teaching theology, teach students first how to think theologically and critically before teaching “systematics” (which should be regarded as an advanced subject); (5) early in the curriculum teach theories of interpretation, literary theory, and philosophies of interpretation and textuality; (6) include and integrate artistic, literary, and musical interpretations of scripture; and finally, (7) introduce practical disciplines all along the way with a particular focus on them in the end.

Panel Discussion

Richard Ascough, *Queens University*: Our purpose in this panel is not to provide a critical review that would either tear down or praise Dale’s book. Rather our panel is to be a conversation about pedagogical issues raised by the book. So I’m going to start by asking each of you to speak for just one or two minutes to give us some initial reactions to the book, specifically the issues that the book raises about pedagogy.

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Edward Wimberly, *Interdenominational Theological Center*: Well, I guess I'll start. I have to tell you, Dale, that I delivered a bible study based on your work. Not a bible study actually. I was speaking to about one hundred and forty ordinates of the Methodist Church in the Southeast. The session was about helping them learn how to prepare church bible studies. I told my own story about how I was so intimidated after finishing seminary that I lost all confidence in my ability to interpret the scripture. (I started preaching when I was just nineteen years old, and I was a much better preacher before I entered seminary than after.) I read them a passage from your book that really stuck with me: "I believe students in most theological schools are not being taught how to think critically – that is, in a self-reflective way – about what it is they are doing, and should be doing, when they interpret text" (18). Before I went to seminary I trusted my Wesleyan background, having grown up as a preacher's kid, listening to my dad preach all the time. But when I started preaching after seminary and had to do a sermon every Sunday, I would just go through the commentary I was using and give it privilege in my life – forgetting everything that I had learned prior to going to seminary and finding out about commentaries and all of that. It took me about ten to fifteen years to rediscover myself.

So, should we use the historical model? I would say "yes." But my question is, "at what point"? Zan Holmes was a Methodist preacher who taught me to always go to the text and let it speak to me first before going to a commentary. And so it is a procedural knowledge that I would recommend. In other words, I go to the text first, then to the commentaries, and then to my denomination for help.

I have more to say but I'll just stop there for now.

Seung Ai Yang, *Chicago Theological Seminary*: From a pedagogical perspective, I have been struggling a lot for the last twenty years with the use of the term "method" in teaching biblical studies – both in seminary and in liberal arts education. The use of the term "method" in biblical studies began in modern times with the use of the historical critical method. And with the use of this term what was usually meant was the "scientific method," which was thought to guarantee a fully objective result that was universally valid. So, rather than use the term "method" to understand the process of the historical critical approach, in my own practice and teaching experience I use the term "lens" to describe what I am doing with historical critical insights.

At the same time, as much as I appreciate Dale Martin's suggestions for seminary curriculum revision, I don't think that reorganizing the order of courses to take in a M.Div. program would necessarily help seminarians to be better equipped to serve the Church after graduation. I would still teach introduction to biblical studies in their first year. Rather than reorganizing which field should be introduced first to our seminary students, the most important reform in seminary education would be related to the question of *how* rather than *when* biblical interpretation is introduced. I think the most important thing in theological education is, as Martin also suggests, to teach critical thinking: having a dialogue with a biblical text. In biblical studies, it is about how to engage critically with biblical texts. I have experimented with this and have had some success in my teaching. So I would be happy to talk about this more a little bit later.

A.K.M. Adam (AKMA), *Duke University*: I greatly appreciated the book, as the rest of the panel seems to have as well. I was reading along with you, Dale, and cheering very enthusiastically the whole way. But when I came to the end, I wondered what had become of the fully provocative, radically subversive streak in your work. The result of

your suggestion is a seminary curriculum that is reordered, but still depends on parceled out units of time and disciplinary division, to a large extent. The exhilarating rhetoric leading up to your conclusion seemed to call all this into question. And as a home-school parent it occurred to me that your vision in the first few chapters would be served by a much less structured educational enterprise. Indeed, in the beginning of the last chapter, the metaphor you offer of a monastery could serve the purposes you present without the cumbersome superstructure of units, credits, divisions, evaluation, and so forth. So I'd like to hear more from you about that.

Sandie Gravett, *Appalachian State University*: I'm kind of the odd fish out here, not having been in theological education for sixteen years now. But what I remember from teaching in divinity school was that often times the students would come to me and say, "If we taught what we learned in your class in church we would be fired." I remember developing a course on how to apply biblical studies to the church context.

But I want to speak here more from my perspective as an undergraduate educator in a public university. I think the book is right on target with regards to theological education. But it reminds me again of the significance of the history of how historical critical methods first took hold – and that was to find a legitimate academic approach to the biblical material that could be accepted in a wider scholarly community. In the university, we still struggle with that. At Appalachian State we're revamping our general education curriculum and we've been told that people don't want to join with us because they're not interested in courses that "do Sunday school" and that they're not interested in "doing theology." So we still have trouble being accepted. Therefore, what occurred to me was that we need more than just a re-imagination of what biblical scholarship becomes in a theological education context; we need to think about what biblical scholarship *is* as an academic discipline. I think that's a much larger question.

The book also raises the question of how we're going to train biblical scholars who are capable of doing the kind of teaching that the book prescribes. Many of us come out of divinity schools and then go right into graduate theological education institutions dominated by people who were also educated in divinity schools. But we also have to think about how we're going to train scholars to interact in the university setting that I work in. This also is a job placement setting.

Richard Ascough: I wonder if we could open it up a little bit by asking, "What's at stake here"? Who gains? Who loses? Is there really a problem with what's being done now that needs to be fixed? And if we do implement this or some other reform in trying to address this problem in seminaries, then do undergraduate professors lose? Or do they win? What would it look like if this sort of reform started to take root?

Edward Wimberly: I think that what's at stake is theological education itself: funding, finding students, finding denominations that want to send their students to our seminaries.

I'm speaking as an administrator. I think the Association of Theological Schools has got it right. The focus now is on student learning outcomes. We're moving away from the teacher to focus on the students. And we're struggling with that in our institution. Teaching students to be self-reflective applies throughout the whole curriculum. Students have to be able to use their faith heritage. They have to be able to interpret scripture. They also have to learn to put things in the historical, sociological, and cultural context. They also have to engage in professional, personal, and spiritual formations. And they

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have to learn the practices of ministry. It would seem to me that the curriculum should be organized around student learning outcomes. You have to demonstrate that students are learning these things, and that these outcomes have some import for the church. Then I think we would be in better shape. But it's an issue of the survival of theological education itself.

Sandie Gravett: I noticed, Dale, that when you are suggesting curriculum revisions, one of the things that you've done is to take out languages – that is, Greek and Hebrew. I kept thinking about how when I watch a foreign film in a language that I understand, I know that the subtitles miss a lot. I'm concerned about the students whom I send to divinity school, with what little knowledge I know that they have of the biblical text, that they won't receive knowledge there of the biblical text, and biblical languages, and some of the other things that I think are important to understand. So while I agree with you that we don't need the historical critical method to hold off the “chaos of interpretation” that many fear, I'm also concerned that in a lot churches today we're getting only a “theology lite” – at best. I worry about this trend increasing not decreasing, with a model of seminary education that doesn't study the Bible with the kind of rigor that the historical critical method asks of us. This is our gatekeeper role.

Dale Martin, Yale University: Yes. Let me first say that some of the questions you're raising – especially one that AKMA and you, Sandie, raised – are ones that I worried about a lot when I was writing the book. But I had very limited objectives. Partly this is because, as I said in the beginning of the book, I've never taught in a theological school. This is not my field. And I haven't spent years, as you have Sandie, talking about pedagogical issues either. I haven't written anything on pedagogy, ever. I very much felt that I was getting into a field that I didn't know much about. But then, as I also say in the preface, I've never had children either and that doesn't stop me from telling my siblings how to raise theirs. So I just decided to go bowling.

But I have to say, that I was trying to make very limited points. I was pushing on some very limited, minimal kinds of things: like simply, there's just too much historical criticism in theological education and not enough of everything else; there's not enough critical thinking about interpretation theory; and there's not enough education in how to think theologically. Those are the main points I wanted to make, and then ask, “What we want to do about it?” The points that you all are raising as problems are things that I too see as problems, because I was covering my back.

And as for undergraduates, I really haven't given thought to how this relates to my undergraduate teaching. I think theological education is a very different thing from teaching in a secular liberal arts undergraduate department. I'm starting to think about this. But this is a really big issue.

The other big issue was precisely as AKMA said. The final chapter suggests the idea of constructing theological education like you would a monastery in the Middle Ages. But I realized that most people are going to just throw up their hands and say the book is absolutely useless if you expect us to do that. So by the very end of the book I felt it was better to be minimal. It is enough to just tweak the existing curriculum of some of these places, and that would be enough to improve things somewhat.

I published the book to try to jump-start a discussion especially among biblical scholars, the people I work with, who don't really want to talk about this. I think there are some schools that are already having this discussion. Chicago Theological Seminary

is one of the best for dealing with these things on a self-conscious surface level. But a lot of the places that I've encountered – including in my own graduate education, now twenty-five years ago – the biblical people didn't want to talk about this.

A.K.M. Adam (AKMA): May I raise something else about which biblical people don't talk articulately enough, that engenders a huge problem in teaching scripture to undergraduates and seminarians alike, which is: what makes some interpretations better than others? I have a very hard time getting students to talk about that at all. They want to say, "Well now, Professor Gravett said so," or "It was in the book that Ascough wrote," or something like that. And I say, "Right, but there are many wacky books out there: *Left Behind*, and *The DaVinci Code*, and lots of stuff in between too." What makes one of these a wacky reading and another a sound reading? Students are very reluctant to venture onto this terrain. I think that part of the reason is that we as teachers and as writers don't make it clear what we're talking about. We understand one another because we've been acculturated into the same way of thinking about issues. Even though we disagree on many topics, we have assimilated a model of thinking and judging that we share. But we don't seem to be able to communicate it to someone who doesn't already share it. What we have to do is make them think like us. Then we can talk with them about the Bible. But getting to the point where we can name, discuss, defend, or abandon criteria is a huge job for teaching in any kind of context.

Seung Ai Yang: I completely understand that there are substantial differences between theological education (where the primary mission and work is to prepare people for ministry) and the liberal arts education (a higher education setting where Bible is taught as one of many humanities). Having said that, however, I find many issues in common for teaching the Bible in both contexts. I am saying this as a person who has taught in both contexts, and also who grew up in East Asia where I was nurtured (as well as negatively influenced, of course) by Confucian wisdom. One of the bits of Confucian wisdom I always carry is from the scripture called *The Great Learning*. Let me attempt to summarize the relevant paragraph in one sentence: the ultimate goal of learning is to bring peace to the world, which begins with the learner's own transformation. Depending on your religious affiliation, you can paraphrase or contextualize this Confucian saying in many different ways. For example, while emphasizing the transformative power of critical interpretation of the Bible, I invite my seminarians to think of their ultimate goal of theological education in terms of bringing the reign of God to the world, whereas for non-seminarians, I invite them to think of their ultimate biblical studies goal in terms of transforming society toward peace and justice.

What I'm saying is that seminary and liberal arts education should share the same ultimate goal by teaching critical interpretation of biblical studies. On top of the long history of biblical interpretation that has often served those who misuse power to oppress and marginalize others, the changing landscape of the Christian population in today's transnational and globalized world urgently calls for the importance of critical interpretation of biblical literature. We have also witnessed in the recent (2008) presidential election that the Bible was implicitly or explicitly quoted with great frequency. As biblical scholars I think we have the responsibility to invite the public (whoever the public is, and of course for us primarily our students), to think critically when reading the Bible.

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So, to sum, I'm a little bit uncomfortable with thinking in too much of a binary mode: liberal arts education on the one hand and seminary education on the other. Even when we ask who is the winner and who is the loser; in many cases, the loser is at the same time the winner from another perspective.

Richard Ascough: Ed mentioned student-centered learning. I teach in a context (Queens University, Kingston, Ontario) where I have undergraduate religious studies students in the same classroom with seminary students. I'm asked to teach a course in New Testament and early Christian origins to both, together. This raises quite starkly for me the whole issue of ATS standards, which say that if you have undergraduates in your class then you have to design a different syllabus for them, with different learning outcomes. Reading Dale's book raised a lot of these issues for me: what is it I think I'm doing in the classroom, and who gets to decide? Is it the governing body? Is it the seminary side of the institution where I teach or the undergraduate side? Or, is the decision made by my students – when I ask them on the first day of class what they want to get out of the course? I believe that ultimately I am the one who determines the learning outcomes. But the book raises issues that help me think through what it is I think I'm up to in the classroom and how that matches with the students that I actually have in class. I wonder if others of you have experienced similar sorts of things with what you're doing in your teaching.

Dale Martin: I still am going to insist that there is a radical difference between teaching the Bible read by Christians theologically and teaching it in an Arts and Sciences context. I think the norms of good interpretation in those two contexts are very, very different.

I do have one lecture in my undergraduate course, at the very end of the semester, where I discuss how theological interpretation of this text would look very different from what they have gotten for the entire semester in this course. I get student evaluations back that are furious at me, because they're not religious and they think I'm giving the religious students an out. Or else they say, "Look if that's what really matters why weren't we learning this all semester instead of all this stuff you've been teaching us."

But I don't think it's my responsibility to teach Yale undergraduates the improvisation skills that they probably should have if they're adult Christians. And that's the hardest thing about teaching theological interpretation: how do you teach improvisation? That's not an easy thing to teach.

A.K.M. Adam: (AKMA): Especially if students don't *think* that's what they are there to learn. If they think they're there to learn correct answers on ordination exams, or to please denominational authorities, or to live out the goals that they have set for themselves as preachers, then teaching them improvisation is nearly futile.

Sandie Gravett: I want to return to and agree with what Dale said: teaching undergraduates is a completely different ball game from teaching in a divinity school. But I also think that we at the Society of Biblical Literature level now really have to think strongly about what it means to be a biblical scholar. Who is it that we are? And how is it that we relate to each other? Whether or not we teach undergraduates or graduate and professional students, how do we relate not only to one another, and not only to our colleagues who might be church historians or theologians, but also to our colleagues

who are Hindu scholars, Buddhist scholars, or Islamic scholars? How do we relate to religious studies as a discipline? I think that these are the kinds of questions that we have to grapple with now if we're going to think about what biblical scholarship means in an educational context. And while Dale's book is rightly focused on theological education, it at least hints at broadening these questions out.

Dale Martin: Yes. I agree. At Yale we have a directed studies program – Yale's version of the great books curriculum – that a few students can opt for. Just last Friday I gave a talk to this group on the New Testament and the Gospel of Matthew and Romans, all in fifty minutes. I realized that I was much more conscious about doing that (that is, relating the significance of the New Testament to the history of "Western Civilization") than I normally am. This was perhaps because it is a great books course where they're reading the New Testament not for what it meant historically, necessarily – although I think they actually do assume that they are reading for what it meant historically. They think that I'm going to tell them what Paul really did say and thought and then what Matthew was really about – in the first century. They just assume that once I've done that then they will know the text's meaning. But I very deliberately raised with them this issue of the importance of different contexts for interpretation. I told them that I was going to give them three different stories: one about how the church has read Matthew and Romans; a second about the ways that we historians have read these texts very differently from the church (we don't read Matthew, for example, as the Pentateuch or the Torah for a new religion, nor do we see Paul as founding a new religion); and then suggested that a third way would be to read these texts theologically, and that's another story as well.

So I was very conscious that one of the things I had to focus on – even in an undergraduate setting – was the history of interpretation: the cultural importance of these documents over the last two thousand years. This was not my training for my PhD. But I think that even with our current PhD students at Yale we're going to have to start incorporating more of this history of interpretation, the history of the cultural readings of these texts. This is going to be important even if they are teaching in a secular context.

Richard Ascough: Is there any point in keeping the Bible at the center of the theological education curriculum, or is it just privileging one text even though we might give it multiple interpretations?

Dale Martin: That has to be a theological answer. I would go back to good traditional Christian orthodoxy and say that scripture holds a special place as a text in ways that other – even Christian and inspirational – literature doesn't. But I couldn't do that without referring to the history of the church and the creeds. It is all embedded in an assumed theology of scripture. So while I would not say that somebody is not a Christian if they believe that a Nag Hammadi text should be read in church, I'm certainly going to make an argument that those texts should not hold the same place in church worship as canonical scripture and that Christian theological education properly emphasizes these particular texts.

Richard Ascough: Should we perhaps not include specific courses on the Bible for the undergraduate liberal arts curriculum?

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Dale Martin: No. Undergraduates like these courses. And historical criticism rings true to them. There's something liberative to a lot of people about historical criticism. It was for me. Undergraduates love learning these historical critical skills. But then what I have to continue to do after I teach them these skills, is to back off and say, "Now, that's not the only way to read this text. Don't think that just because I've given you these skills that you can go back to your dorm room and tell your Southern Baptist friends that they're necessarily wrong."

Richard Ascough: I'm going to open up the discussion now to include everyone in the room.

John Riches, *University of Glasgow*: I want to ask Dale what sort of biblical studies he's really talking about here. It seems to me that biblical studies emerged in the nineteenth century with two very different branches. There was [F. C.] Baur, who was doing a theological interpretation using a Hegelian model; and there were people like Lightfoot who wanted to do strict exegesis and leave theology to the Anglican divines. (I'm not sure that was a good move.) But we have had these two models, one of which was pursued very aggressively and creatively in Germany, and was deeply theological, and the other which was a-theological. I think part of the confusion I'm encountering in this discussion, which is very odd to me, is because we don't have this division between liberal arts and theological seminaries in the UK. In any case, I think we've boxed ourselves in to an a-theological approach to historical criticism. And I see no reason why it should be.

Dale Martin: Yes, John that's exactly right. But I would say that what you're calling the a-theological biblical scholarship of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century was actually entirely theologically driven. Like our analysis of the history of religions, we all know now, with Jonathan Z. Smith's work and a lot of other scholars as well, that even the people who were trying to do a-theological work in German universities betray a clear theological agenda. We now look back and say, "well that's so Protestant and it's so anti-Catholic and so anti-Jewish and so theologically driven."

But I do think that we're in a different kind of place now from those kinds of differences that split the discipline back then. What I'm talking about may well be something that exists mainly in the United States and even then mainly in Protestant schools. I intentionally concentrated my study only on Protestant seminaries and divinity schools (although I tried to get a wide range of those). I knew that if I tried to bring in Roman Catholic seminaries the situation would look very different. (Partly, this is because they're in a big state of flux right now in how they treat biblical studies, and they're also bringing lots of lay people into their theological institutions.) And I decided not to study Jewish schools as well, because they're also completely different. But I do think if you take the basic way that New Testaments studies and Hebrew Bible scholarship are taught at the major graduate programs training PhD students throughout the United States, it's remarkably consistent and monolithic about what counts as good scholarship. I don't think you could come in from the outside and know which of my PhD students are Christian, which are Protestant, which are Roman Catholic, which are Jewish and which are nothing. They all write papers that look basically the same. They use the same methodologies. They participate in the seminars the same. What that's showing me is that we're training people in a very monolithic way. It's what I call "generic historical

criticism.” So I think the things that you’re talking about don’t exist as fissures any more, at least in American education.

John Richards: I don’t think what you’re doing at Yale is all that different from what people are doing in Durham, and that’s the tradition which quite definably comes from Lightfoot. The reason why you’re going to have Jewish and Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars all turning out the same kind of papers is because you’ve gutted it theologically. You’ve told them those aren’t issues that are discussed. You’ve given them a method that will enable them to understand the social context out of which these ideas came. That’s fine. Because you don’t ask what was it that these people were *trying to say* – which is what we find in the traditions and interpretations within the church that we’re interested in. You cut the text off from that history of interpretation.

If you want people to improvise, then to tell them that these are texts which only have a meaning for the first century and can only be discussed in those terms would obviously be very debilitating. If you want to say these texts historically have had these rich readings and you need to “improvise” in your interpretation of them, then you need both: creative historical criticism and the history of interpretation.

Bill Smith, *pastor of a Baptist church in North Arlington, Virginia:* Let’s say that my successor is coming from a theological school, one of the schools where you teach. What should the church members expect? Do those church members have a voice in what’s taught at schools where you’re located?

Dale Martin: What I have learned from people who teach in theological education is: yes churches actually do have something to say about what’s being taught in seminaries. There are denominational bodies in churches that give constant feedback. So churches, at least institutionally, are having a say.

If a minister is educated the way I’m proposing they be educated, they would see their ministry not as simply passing on the data that they received at seminary, but as trying to teach lay people in their church how to think theologically. In other words, it’s like teaching a musician how to improvise so that he or she can then teach other musicians how to improvise. It’s a modeling kind of behavior. One of the issues I try to call attention to in my book is that “everyday people” do not know how to think theologically. People want religious faith to be simple. But if you’re an adult you know that religious faith is not simple. Theological education should, I think, prepare ministers to teach the people in their church not just stuff about the Bible, but how to themselves learn to think theologically.

Bill Smith: What role do these people who are going to be taught by the students, graduates of your schools, have in forming curriculum, not just complaining and firing the students who come back and teach this sort of historical criticism? Can a lawyer, a doctor, a repairman, can someone in my congregation actually contribute to the formation of your curriculum? Is there a place for that?

A.K.M. Adam (AKMA): The answer should be yes. In the hypothetical “cathedral” image of the seminary that Dale describes in the latter part of the book there are contributions from all sorts of crafts and people with all the varieties of gifts. Think of church choirs, which are not usually constituted of theologians – and yet the participation of the

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choir provides a very powerful interpretive frame for assimilating theological and biblical lessons. So if we were to shape our pedagogy along the lines that Dale describes then that would be a strong affirmative for the participation of common churchgoers in this process. The trick is helping people like us (biblical scholars) and people like our bosses (our administrators) learn how to think about theological education so that we consistently and responsibly teach this interpretive process, and we don't get fired for not teaching what so many students and so many congregations want (which is the right answers to questions).

Sandie Gravett: But I think also that – like the model of liberation theology in which communities taught professional academics something about what it means to read the Bible on the ground – divinity schools have to be receptive to what's being read in communities and have to be interactive with that reality. Whether it be through a distance education program, or through placement, or through active listening, theological institutions need to not proceed with the kind of blinders or shackles that methodology puts around our imagination.

Dale Martin: One example I came across where things going on in the church have influenced what takes place in the seminary is the practice of centering prayer and *lectio divina*. These are things that seemed to begin much more “on the ground” in churches and religious communities and then subsequently have made their way more prominently into the curriculum of some schools.

Richard Ascough: I think in some ways we created this monster ourselves. At my institution we get just a small percent of our budget from the denomination. Again, Canadian schools are different from US schools in this. We're mostly publicly funded. So a small percent of our budget comes from the denomination and yet the bulk of the curricular recommendations come from them – and often these suggestions are uninformed pedagogically never mind theologically. So we feel justified in pushing back. Yet at the same time I think we created this monster because when we model a teacher centered approach to learning that places all the authority in the teacher, the pastors we've created then go out into the church and become pastor-focused ministers. They take on that authority and then try to wield that authority back at the seminary too, telling us what we should and shouldn't be doing. We become subservient to them. I think it's a cycle that really needs to be broken. I think developing more student-centered learning processes is part of breaking that cycle. But there are times when student-centered learning becomes the students being the only ones telling the faculty what is appropriate and what needs to be taught. That's a misunderstanding of the phrase “student-centered.”

Seung Ai Yang: In my previous work setting at a denominational seminary, our curriculum was very much influenced by what the Church said. In that setting, the church controls seminary education, but the church here means the church authority, not the people the seminarians are called to serve. My current institution, Chicago Theological Seminary, is quite different, and I'm very proud of it. Here, students bring their church concerns to the class. Their churches include not just the institutional setting of churches, but often their ministry with homeless people or helping people who struggle with AIDS or who are in prison. The concerns and issues of their churches, which the students

bring to class, are often the entering point to reading and interpreting biblical texts. In other words, the churches are strongly involved with the students' education. The class – teacher and students together – learns from the church and with the church. We are truly a community of learners together. In this model, we are not acting out an authoritarian model of the teacher-student relationship. Instead we are actually a community of learners, mutually respecting and learning together.

So when you ask what influence the church has on seminary curriculum, the answer depends on what you mean by the church, and it can vary from one seminary setting to another.

Timothy Cargal, *Ecumenical Institute of Theology at St. Mary's Seminary and University*: I teach New Testament, but I also serve as a pastor and currently I moderate the subcommittee of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that writes the ordination exam in biblical exegesis. One of the interesting things I've had to do this fall is respond to a change that the church made at its General Assembly this last summer. We changed the standard for how those examinations are done. Where we previously requested a description of "the principle meaning" of the text, we now ask for the candidate to offer a "faithful interpretation" of the text applied to a context of ministry.

One of the things that's been interesting to me as we have tried to apply this is what Professor Martin and the others have talked about as the multi-valence of the text. Despite the long history of understanding the scriptural texts in this way, I find that it is the most "churchly conservatives," if you will, who push back the strongest against that idea. They feel like we've now opened up interpretation to almost anything. There's no way we could possibly give an exam anymore if we're going to accept as "a faithful interpretation," for example, that this text means "what my faith tells me it means." We've had to try to say that there are other ways of understanding the phrase "faithful interpretation" other than simply "what my faith tells me."

So, in response to this danger of open interpretation, part of what we've been trying to stress to our ordination candidates is that their exam response has to be a theological reading for a community of faith. This isn't an academic exam. We're looking to see if candidates can apply their academic work to the theological work that they'll be doing with a community of faith. We are trying to open up this approach to them by changing some of the language in the exams. Whether or not the churches are eager and clamoring for this kind of change depends on which churches you're talking about. Even within a single denomination there are some that very much want to reinforce the teaching of historical criticism as a way to clamp down on what they see as an anarchy of interpretations.

So in the Presbyterian tradition of which I'm a part, there's been a real switch in the last one hundred years – from the time of J. Gresham Machen where this "horrible" historical criticism was the enemy of the conservatives to the situation today where it's their bastion. One of the things that we're having to wrestle with is trying to make it possible for the ordinands who are using a variety of methods to successfully navigate an exam that doesn't force them down a particular chute.

Dale Martin: Yes, my research completely bears that out. The more evangelical schools that I visited were the ones that were most centered on teaching the historical critical method and pretty much only that. Over the twentieth century, liberals and conservatives have completely flipped their positions concerning historical criticism.

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Susan Garrett, *Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary*: Dale I want to press you on your assertion that you really haven't given any thought to the implications of what you've said for teaching undergraduates. First, I don't believe that. Certainly you make a lot of important proposals about how to teach divinity students. But the critiques you make of the historical critical method – that it reinforces a particular understanding of the nature of textual meaning (what AKMA calls the theory of subsistence or subsistent meaning in the text) – would seem to render it quite problematic for the undergraduate level as well. Why is it okay to teach undergraduates that the text's meaning can be fixed in a certain historical-critically defined way, and then suddenly when they get out of undergraduate work we hope that their education has broadened their horizons so they can see that a text means in different ways?

Dale Martin: Actually, I do start off my undergraduate courses at Yale by laying out some issues like that: what's the proper way to read a text, and what's the proper way to read a text in different kinds of social contexts. I start my historical Jesus class by warning them that if they're here to learn about Jesus as their personal friend and savior, then this course is not going to help them. I try to explain what the historical Jesus is. But also, throughout the semester, I keep repeating that this is just one way of constructing a Jesus. It's not the only Jesus. It's not the right one. It's just one Jesus.

Therefore, I also have to introduce them to a little bit of postmodernity. I try to keep it as philosophically simple and low level as I can. In my New Testament class, I basically say I'm going to teach you one or two or three ways of reading the New Testament and early Christianity, and I'm telling you from the beginning that, if you're a Christian, this may not be the best way for you to read this text as a Christian. We'll talk about that a couple of times in the semester. But I haven't gotten to the point yet where I've decentered historical criticism so much for my undergraduate course that it's not still the primary way I'm teaching them – although I keep trying to remind them and remind them and remind them that it's only one way, and that historical criticism does not simply give us the meaning of the text. It gives us the meaning constructed by historians who have been trained in the twentieth century. It gives us a construction of the meaning of the text.

But no. I do not, for example, do allegorical readings of the text, or something like that. There's one lecture on the pre-modern history of interpretation of the New Testament that I just started giving recently as I started writing this book. It's just illustrative. I don't try to teach my undergraduates, for example, Origen's theory of four levels of meaning and how they could interpret the text using each of them. If I truly revised my undergraduate curriculum more along the lines of the critique I make in this book, I think I would have to press the revision of my New Testament introduction course a lot more than I'm doing now.

Susan Garrett: I guess the main thing I'm taking away from what you're saying is that you are not just teaching out of the textbook: here's the historical critical method. You are surrounding that with all kinds of commentary, which really is teaching them to reflect critically on what they're doing when they interpret – even using the historical critical method.

Kwok Pui Lan, *Episcopal Divinity School*: We've heard from a lot of biblical scholars today about the importance of theology within biblical studies. Since I teach theology, I

want to offer my perspective on this issue. When I was in graduate school, there was little cross-fertilization between the biblical department and the theological department. Since historical criticism was the reigning paradigm of the day, students in biblical studies were trained primarily to be historians. They were more interested in what the text meant to its original audience, than what the text means today. The conversation this afternoon brings to the forefront the need to rethink the assumptions of theological education and the compartmentalization of disciplines. These days there are many more competing paradigms of interpretation, such as feminist, literary-rhetorical, liberationist, and postcolonial methods, just to name a few. In a recent book, *Still at the Margins* (Sugirtharajah, Continuum, 2008), the authors note that these approaches are still marginalized in the field. Some of these approaches do not contradict the historical critical method, but use it with great skills to expand and enrich it. Yet they are still being treated as subordinate and secondary.

Dale Martin: It seems to me that it is less conscious and intentional than it is simply the inertia of the “disciplinary-ness” of scholarship. I think that we just tend to reproduce our own education in the classroom. It is less intentional than it is inertia.

A.K.M. Adam (AKMA): But also let’s be candid about the fact that there is a political element too – the power of dominant groups to resist change. If for instance you say that there is not a subsistent meaning in a text (that it is the exegete’s job to arrive at and conclude and propound as final and authoritative) but that there are instead a variety of more or less plausible, more or less responsible, more or less theologically sound readings, then those who are invested in being the ultimate arbiters of correct interpretations are going to resist that change because it undermines the basis for their hegemony.

Dale Martin: Yes, if you get a PhD in New Testament studies and then you publish allegorical interpretations à la Origen, you will not be hired at many PhD training institutions because the biblical scholars at those places don’t see that as true biblical scholarship.

Sandie Gravett: Yes, and there is also a social dimension to this: where are you going to get published? How are you going to get tenure anywhere on that sort of scholarship? Who are you having conversation with? There is an entire structure built around historical critical scholarship, and I think that’s why any other approach to biblical studies is still on the margins. It is only after you get tenure and are successful in historical criticism that can that you even open up this conversation.

Dale Martin: It’s no accident that I didn’t publish this book until I was a full professor.

Renate Hood, LeTourneau University: I teach at a small Christian university in the South. But with the globalization of education we get a lot of international students, and sometimes our degree is the end of their education. Sometimes we have a student that we all get to know and track. Then they may switch majors, and decide to become a biblical studies major. We are the end of the road for them. They go on into Christian ministry with a denomination, directly from our program, without having had any seminary education. Perhaps this is okay, especially in certain parts of the world where they will go back to their region or village and be the only person with a real education. I

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think we have to realize that our school is sometimes providing the only seminary experience they will have. We certainly try to encourage them to go to seminary, but cannot deliver them to your doorsteps.

We get students who are like a blank slate. They have very little knowledge of the Bible or theology. I recall my own childhood growing up in Western Europe: all I knew about scripture was that it had something to do with a baby and some sheep. I'm the one who still tends to write on that blank slate for them. It's a superb responsibility, because I want the students to be able to think, and yet they look at me and ask the most elementary questions. The moment I start to use a lens, I am doing an interpretive task, and I have been trained a certain way theologically. So where do we start?

Unidentified Audience Member: I am an independent scholar and Hebraist. I'm independent because I've had to develop my own methodology in order to talk about theology – how the Hebrew text was composed to have some kind of a theological message. I don't mean to debate here about whether they do or they don't have a theological message. My point is only that the historical approach excludes this from the discussion. If we don't begin with being able to talk about how texts were composed so as to be theological then it seems to me we've missed the first thing in that discussion and the subsequent task of the history of reception and interpretation doesn't have its cornerstone.

Sandie Gravett: I think one of the real dangers in undergraduate education, when we're trying to please colleagues from other departments who think we're doing voodoo or Sunday School, is that we mustn't be afraid to talk about how these texts have a theological dimension to them. We have to own that and put it out there. But what are the criteria by which we can have this discussion without it becoming sectarian? We should not put a particular denominational interpretation on the text. It is not a matter of advocating for or against God. It is not about defending our atheist students or our non-Christian or non-Jewish students. But, yes, we still have to find a way to bring that element into the classroom because this is the way those texts are used in the real world and this is the world these students are going to live in – whether it is, for example, how the candidates are referring to these texts in an election, or how the Supreme Court is using them, or how the communities in which they live are wielding those texts, or if the texts have some connection to their science course and their English literature. These are all real forces; I do think that we have to find a way to talk about those things in the classroom.

Doug Boin, *University of Texas at Austin*: It seems to me that you are saying that we need to find a way to speak nondenominationally or find a rubric to confront the text without pinning one denomination against another. My background is liberal Jesuit Catholic, and I come into this room and see a bunch of people without a flashlight trying to find a way to argue around the fact that you don't want to be a literalist. If that's the goal, why not just say it? Why not change the theology to support it?

Dale Martin: What do you mean by “don't want to be a literalist?”

Doug Boin: That there are discrepancies within the text is something that was just taken for granted from day one of my undergraduate training. We didn't have to establish that

Adam, Ascough, Gravett, Hunt, Martin, Wimberly, and Yang

fact. We didn't have to worry about it as a problem of the text. It seems like this is a denominational difference. If you just admit that you're coming from a particular theological standpoint where this discrepancy in the text is a potential problem, then you're being more honest and maybe you can get somewhere.

A.K.M. Adam (AKMA): But in fact it's even more complicated than you suggest. Although on one hand people don't want to be literalists, on the other hand when scripture says things like "clothe the naked," and "feed the hungry" – well there of course we know that God does in fact call us to do exactly that, so we happily read that text quite literally. So there is a self-contradictory repudiation of literalism that vitiates the integrity of the whole discourse.

Doug Boin: In that respect though, there is an elaborate theology that is built into the tradition which I think it important to emphasize. Why is there so much emphasis on New Testament studies instead of Protestant studies? There seems to be this idea that emphasizing New Testament studies (apart from the theology) will give you the proper theology. I work in the Greco-Roman world. I understand the Greco-Roman world. But if the theology is what you're trying to incorporate back into pedagogy then why not incorporate the history of Protestant theology into New Testament studies to begin with? This, it seems to me, would unlock some of the issues explaining why people are hamstrung in interpreting the text the way they want to interpret the text.

Dale Martin: I think you're assuming a lot about the way our students approach the text, and also about what we're talking about here. What I argue in the book is that talking about the literal sense of the text is itself problematic. There's no such thing as "the literal sense of the text." Talking about what's in the text, or what the text says, or pointing out all contradictions of the text – all of that is a kind of cultural common sense that our students bring to the text, whether they're Protestant or not. The problem we face is to change the questions that they come to the text with. We need to teach them that they cannot come to the text to simply find out what it says, to find out what's in the text. That, inevitably, necessarily, anyone who comes to the text comes for some sort of purpose. Now what's your purpose for coming to this text? I'm not going to say. But if you're coming to the text as a Christian reading this text as scripture, then you need to first start with theology, not with "what the Bible says."

You're exactly right in saying that a lot of the questions that we are talking about are very Protestant and Modernist tinged. But I would simply say that this is where most Americans are.

Doug Boin: I agree completely with that. But when you said that we're coming to this text as Christians I would just say we're coming to this text as Protestant Christians. The denominationalism has to be there.

Dale Martin: Yes of course. I agree. Like I said previously, I didn't visit Catholic seminaries for this study. I visited ten schools and they were all Protestant, because I recognized that Protestant and Catholic seminaries are very different things.

But I would point out that what I keep hearing from my Roman Catholic friends is that, unfortunately, the Roman Catholic way of teaching the Bible has been increasingly influenced by the older Protestant approaches. And I think that's the wrong thing for

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Roman Catholic schools to do. I'm particularly addressing the assumptions that Protestants bring to the text, what they think the text is. But I'm also saying that this is not just about people who are self-consciously Protestants. I think this is prevalent in American culture. I get called all the time by newspaper journalists, and it doesn't matter whether they know anything about the Bible or not, or whether they're Jewish or Roman Catholic or Protestant or whatever. They all start with certain assumptions about the text – what it is, and how to get meaning from it – that are basically Modernist and Protestant. That's why I'm saying we've got to raise that to consciousness in our classrooms. In this book I'm just focused on theological students. I'm not trying to address everything in one book. But one reason we need to raise consciousness about this for theology students is because they need to be educating the rest of society about this, as well as their own church members.

Seung Ai Yang: I too was very much influenced by liberal Jesuit education beginning with my undergraduate studies, and then I taught at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley. My comment is that this discussion seems to be assuming some kind of very clear understanding of what Catholic is and what Protestant is. At the Chicago Theological Seminary, where I now teach, there are many different kinds of Protestant students representing many different denominational settings. So while I hear us all repeating that theology is very important in any approaches to the text, I just want to remind us that that theology is very diverse – even within a single reader. We should not discuss this as though we have a crystal clear understanding about what Protestant, Catholic or Jew is. I myself am an example. I have a very strong Jesuit background and I am a Catholic. I know that I have a very different understanding of “theology” than many other Catholics.

Jane Webster, Barton College: I teach undergraduates at a small liberal arts college in North Carolina, and I am also the chair of the SBL section committee for teaching biblical literature in the undergraduate liberal arts context. So I am very pleased to hear comments about the challenges of teaching biblical literature in the undergraduate context and I struggle to figure out what we need to do in the liberal arts.

We need to teach biblical literacy, of course. Our culture is infused with Biblical references and metaphors and an educated person should know the context from which these are drawn. Familiarity with the Bible is also necessary to understand and analyze popular ethical arguments based on Biblical texts, such as the arguments for abortion or marriage. But what do we do about critical methods? For the business major taking an introductory course on the Bible, there is little value in the intricacies of advanced critical methodology. Nursing and education students don't really need to know about the advanced musings of the Jesus Seminar. But, they should know how to use a concordance, a Bible dictionary, or a commentary. They should have a sense of the major themes and figures of the Bible and their significance just to be educated people. In my opinion, they should also have a preliminary sense of the historical events that provoked the writing and canonization of the Bible so that they might understand the ongoing nature of theology. In addition to basic Biblical literacy, there is educational value in learning how to read and analyze a difficult text. Should we simply be teaching students how to read? Many times they lack even these most basic of skills.

I'm reminded in this conversation of the study conducted by Barbara Walvoord on teaching college introductory religion courses. She concludes that while religious studies

faculty list critical thinking skills as their top learning goal, their students are more likely to be in the classroom searching for personal meaning. So at Barton College we are completely rethinking the curriculum in our religion department to try to accommodate ways for students to explore personal meaning. How do we do that in a biblical studies classroom? How do we assess that in a way that will satisfy our accrediting agency? How do we identify the student learning outcomes? These are questions that we still need to answer.

Robert Duke, Asusa Pacific University: I haven't read the book yet, so you may have addressed some of these issues in your book. This morning I chaired a conference workshop on service learning in biblical studies and I wondered if some of the comments that specific panelists have made would fit this model, such as that we are "not acting out of an authoritarian model of the teacher-student relationship" but are instead "a community of learners, mutually respecting and learning together." I'm wondering what place there is for outside-the-classroom pedagogy? When I hear you discuss this new pedagogy, I still hear you discussing basically lecture and discussion. This is all taking place inside the box of your classroom. How can we unbox the university?

I learned of one experiment from Michael Homan, at Xavier University, teaching biblical studies in post-Katrina New Orleans. While addressing these critical thinking issues, his students have been blogging and interacting with the community. They have been having the sorts of spiritual development and search for meaning that we were just talking about here.

So what role do you see for service learning and experiential education as part of this transformation of pedagogical strategies?

Dale Martin: I'll just say briefly that the only thing in the book that addresses this is very self-consciously limited and suggestive, and at the very end of the book. I say, let's imagine constructing a seminary that would be more like a monastery, in which everyone lives together in a single living community. The pedagogy and the biblical interpretation would be part of the action of the community. It's part of the liturgy, and so forth. That is the only place in the book where I suggest that this pedagogy could go out of the classroom and into the students' lives. But there again, I'm still limiting these suggestions to a theological community that is self-consciously Christian – not just generally religious (or spiritual even), but self-consciously Christian. I did not say anything in the book about undergraduate education. We have been talking about undergraduate education today because people feel like that has to be part of the discussion at some point.

Edward Wimberly: On that issue, I think what you have to say in your book about *lectio divina* (57–58, 100–101), which is a formational process in pre-modern Christianity, is relevant. I'm wondering whether or not that is something that could be used at the undergraduate level for students who may not even be Christian, but are looking for formation in acting out scripture, dramatizing scripture, talking about scripture out loud. I don't know what pedagogical implication that might have, but it would seem to me that this sort of pedagogical strategy wouldn't necessarily have to be Christian. These practices do not have to necessarily have a Christian theological basis behind them – if the student is looking for meaning. I do really want to experiment with something like that.

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When I talk about partnership, I am talking about theological faculty members and ministerial practitioners working collaboratively in the formation process of theological students. The goal of such collaboration will be to enable and to foster the student's development of the kind of critical reflective skills and knowledge needed to undertake strategic ministry thinking and action in the real world of ministry.

Developing pastoral imagination refers to facilitating the development of the kind of reflective skills that enable students to draw on their theological training in biblical studies, theology, ethics, history, in the courses related to understanding persons, society, and culture, and in the practices of ministry that help students to transform this valuable knowledge in ways that can be used in strategic intervention in ministry. Most professors are interested in the integrating and transformative wisdom that is needed for ministry, but it is also important to draw on the wisdom of those practitioners who must carry on their ministries on a daily basis drawing on reflective skills needed to transform what they learned in seminary into practical, particular, and unique circumstances. Faculty members and practitioners working together collaboratively is the best of all possible worlds in fostering pastoral imagination.

Dale Martin: Again, I'm really hesitant to try to tell you everything that I believe about undergraduate education at a place like Yale because it introduces lots of problems.

At Yale, we are very, very careful in the religious studies department to identify ourselves as distinct and separate from the Yale Divinity School. We are also very careful to make sure no one confuses us with any actual religious body on campus: with the chaplaincy, with the Buddhists who practice meditation. So even when someone suggests that we could have a Tibetan Buddhism class practice meditation in the classroom, we're very, very careful about that. I don't think any of us would feel comfortable about doing it.

I do one thing in the classroom that comes close to it. When I teach the Book of Revelation, I try to impress on my students that this text was read aloud – that it is more important to understand how it affected people emotionally as they heard it, than simply understanding the referentiality of the text. So I actually lead my lecture class, about a hundred students, in a three-part chant of different sections of Revelation. It's just a performative kind of thing to get them to feel how saying these words out loud would do something to you. But even then I'm very worried that the non-Christian students in the class will be made uncomfortable by being expected to even chant something like this. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord, God Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come." I'm very nervous about that and at Yale we are very careful.

I think in the current academic situation in the United States, if you're going to teach religious studies at a secular university or college, you have to have a firewall between the experiential practice of that religious tradition and the academic study of it.

Richard Ascough: I think that the question and your response raise a much broader issue about the nature of the university. I know in my institution there are many departments that are starting to experiment with service learning, and yet for similar reasons there are others that won't. One of the questions that is asked is whether doing so would mean taking on more of an apprenticeship model of education, and what then would differentiate the university from a community college? Are they meant to be different or not? So I think these pedagogical questions raise identity issues way beyond even the identity issues that are raised between religious studies versus theology. I applaud you for having that session.

Lucinda Huffaker, *independent scholar*: I want to respond to Dale's argument that there needs to be a "firewall" to keep anything related to personal religious practice divorced from the pure academic study of religion in the liberal arts curriculum. I think that is simply sticking our heads in the sand and does not take seriously the challenge and opportunity we face. Where the perplexity for higher education lies, and what research shows, is that for students a liberal arts education is all about trying to figure out the meaning of life. The Teagle Foundation is contributing major funding to investigate this question. For the academy today: what is our role in the emotional and spiritual development of our students? This discussion is happening with or without input from religious studies.

Dale Martin: I know exactly what you're referring to. And I'm part of it. I'm just saying you may be on the liberal side of that, but I'm not. I'm on the leftist side of it. I'm a Marxist. I don't trust liberals to educate our college students. I'll allow some leftist radicals like me to set up a curriculum, but I'm not going to let Chicago liberals do it.

Lucinda Huffaker: How are you going to resist this movement and resist the desires of our students, if that's what they're expecting from our classes?

Dale Martin: I think very carefully about what values I want to teach in my class. Therefore I do intentionally teach critical thinking. I try to teach honesty. I teach that religious studies is looking at a group of people who do something that seems totally irrational and trying to figure out how it is actually rational for them to do it. That's what religious studies is. I recognize those statements have values embedded in them. I recognize that you can't teach without teaching values. But if you're a religious studies department you have to be very careful when you teach values that you know where those values come from. I recognize that those values I just articulated come not from religion really but from liberal Americana. And so far as I want to go that far with pluralism, I'm going along with American ideology. But I don't want my department to get caught up in identifying what's good in Judaism, what's good in Christianity and what's good in Islam or what's good in Buddhism or what's good in Hinduism, and so forth, and then say "We're going to let students appreciate that as good, so they can build those values for themselves." I believe that's liberal claptrap.

Sandie Gravett: And you have to add another dimension to this, which is the fact that when you're operating in a college of arts and sciences you're operating in a field of faculty who don't care whether you're forming students or not. The biology professors and the psychology professors and the sociologist and the chemist who are on your tenure review committee are not interested in student formation. They're looking at your teaching evaluations and they're evaluating your scholarship. You have to recognize that you have institutional pressures on you that are quite different from this concern or recognition of the spiritual formation of your students.

Gary Brinn, *Vassar College*: I'm glad the Teagle Foundation has been mentioned. I have a two-part comment. First I want to invite my colleagues at undergraduate institutions to take a look at the Vassar College web page. We have just finished a partnership with three other schools: a two-year Teagle-funded study of secularity and the

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liberal arts. The working papers and white papers from this conversation are all available on the Vassar website. (<http://projects.vassar.edu/secularity/conference/index.html>)

Secondly, I'd like to bring the M.Div. curriculum back into view because we seem to have lost theological education here in our discussion of doctoral and undergraduate formation. I want to go back to the question of what happens when M.Div. graduates become pastors in our churches. For me, the pastor has to be a constructive theologian. He or she has to make the history of the church, the theological trajectories of the church, and scripture scholarship, all have meaning in the lives of their congregants. Therefore, theological education should involve constructive theologians in the process of teaching scripture. This is a partnership that I see as natural. How do we start to break down some of these barriers so that I don't have to choose which conference (SBL or AAR) to attend? I can be a theologian and a scripture scholar and a pastor all at the same time.

Edward Wimberly: That's an interesting term, "partnership." I think that's the first time we've used that term today. When I think of a partnership in training constructive theologians I think that the partners need to be those out there in the churches on the frontlines who also are doing some very creative thinking in what we're calling now the "pastoral imagination." The question is, then, how do you foster those kinds of partnerships in the M.Div. curriculum. I have some ideas. Lilly Endowment has some ideas. You have to produce readiness for that to happen, but I think it can. I guess the gate-keeping issue may get in the way, here: the insistence on a certain level of academic rigor. But I'd love some biblical scholars to experiment with that very issue – maybe in some of our practical classes and some of the reflection in those areas.

But I think that partnership is the key. We need to start trying to do some of these sorts of things. I think the church is ready for that.

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Unidentified Audience Member: I think in fact this partnership happens more practically within a small school setting. These are indeed the most productive conversations. When a theologian is trying to teach someone to be a decent preacher he or she cannot be thinking about theology narrowly. You begin to ask how scripture helps with some particular, specific task. And therefore you begin to ask how you can help

Adam, Ascough, Gravett, Hunt, Martin, Wimberly, and Yang

the students to begin to think theologically, rather than think always within a particular department.

It may well be that some of our small schools are going to do a better job with this than larger schools simply because if a teacher like myself is going to have a conversation with someone it's going to have to be someone outside my discipline – because I'm the only person at my school in my discipline. So indeed it may be small schools that actually give us a pattern that could be picked up by the others.

Seung Ai Yang: Thank you so much for bringing that important issue to the table. I used to have an idealistic vision of curriculum revision in the M.Div. program that would involve dividing courses not according to the so-called disciplines but according to certain important theological themes we have to address in ministry. Each course would be taught by at least two, and ideally three or four faculty members, each of a different discipline. For example, for a class on Creation, we would have a constructive theologian, a biblical scholar, a pastoral theologian, and a history professor as co-teachers, each addressing the issue from each disciplinary perspective. But I don't know how practically it could work on the level of institution. It would require a conversion in the spirit of the institution. It would involve the administration, too, of course.

I would like to return to the question raised earlier about service learning as part of a holistic program in integrative thinking. Personally, I would not use the term service learning because it can be a patronizing notion. I prefer the term "community-based learning." For my biblical studies courses I encourage my students when they write a critical interpretative paper to include some kind of community-based learning process by collecting interpretations from their own community – whatever their community is. By using different voices and then adding their critical integration, they create a way of understanding the issue from their own integrative perspective. So again, even though one person authors the paper, it involves lots of different voices in constructing that interpretation. This is not simply honoring different voices but in fact the student has learned a lot from those different voices of the community. This is something that I have used effectively.

Robert Duke: One of the presenters at the service-learning workshop session this morning talked about reading the Book of Job with different community members. Some were inmates; some were in a homeless shelter; all wrestled with theodicy in regards to justice. He said they also were reading a commentary on Job at the same time. So, there can be a back and forth between historical critical scholarship and hearing voices from the community or from the margins or from wherever else.

We did talk about the dangers of using the term service learning, so I would agree with you there. We noted that the term is still in wide use in other divisions, departments, and sectors of the academy.

Richard Ascough: I sense the energy is depleting. This has been a long but productive and constructive session. Thank you to everyone who has contributed.

When first planning this fish-bowl setting focused on Dale Martin's book it was difficult to know how many people attending SBL might be interested in this particular topic, offered in this type of discussion format. We had hoped that many would be interested, but this was somewhat of an experiment. When I saw that we had been scheduled for late Saturday afternoon, I thought the odds were against having a large turnout for

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the session – this is traditionally the time when people are tired of marathon paper sessions and book browsing and are looking towards meeting with friends from afar for dinner and drinks. It is a testimony to Dale's reputation as a critical scholar and to the broad interest of his book that the room filled much beyond capacity, with many people sitting on the floor or lining the walls. Most remained until the end and engaged at various levels in the ongoing conversations.

One of the great benefits to having a multilayered discussion about a focus issue – in this case, how to teach the Bible – is the multitude of voices that can be brought into the discourse. The conversation recorded above demonstrates that there are still multiple perspectives on how and why we teach the Bible the way we do, whether in a seminary setting or a public university. Consensus was impossible to reach, although the comments and conversations were amiable and exploratory, rather than agonistic. This bodes well for future conversations on this very important topic. As Dale notes part way through the conversation, "I published the book to try to jump-start a discussion especially among biblical scholars, the people I work with, who don't really want to talk about this." If the conversations the book stimulated at the SBL session are anything to go by, it has and will serve this purpose well. We are, I think, at the beginning of a new phase in the discussion about the role of the Bible in higher education of all types, and we can, I suspect, look forward to much more engagement on this topic in the near future.

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