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ENCOURAGING THE CHARACTER FORMATION OF FUTURE CHRISTIAN LEADERS

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No longer can it be assumed that incoming seminary students have a working knowledge of the basics of the Christian faith. What is needed to serve Christ with moral excellence must be addressed in the training of our future Christian leaders. The challenges seminaries have to face today include the "fragmented self" with which students enter seminary, their "weak" personal commitments, and reason-oriented versus person-oriented training models. As educators, we observe some of our students coming from homes which modeled values that contradict the Bible and we seek to develop proper values in seminary. How can we expect our students to trust and depend on God when they didn't have parents who were trustworthy in nurturing them? How can we expect students to be honest when their experience is one of distrust? How can people express empathy and compassion when they didn't experience them as children?

In addition, many seminarians have also been affected by the cultural relativism in which they were raised. The emergence of separate social sciences in economic, political, and social affairs which were to be value free changed the moral philosophy taught in the nineteenth century. No longer is there an objective moral foundation from which values flow. Rather, values are constructed as needed to meet the needs of the individual and society. By contrast, the real distinctive of Christian higher education is a holistic integration of faith and learning, an active penetration of all the disciplines and all life callings with the beliefs and values that make up a Christian world view. These values are objective and rooted in universal aspects of our lives in God's creation, not relative to an individual or situation. These values are not only *what* is taught but are reflected in *how* they are taught. Everyone who teaches is modeling ethics, whether good or bad.[1]

Consequently, seminary professors find teaching getting more difficult each successive year. As they see society changing, knowledge increasing, and families experiencing heartache and separation, educators feel the need not only to teach the basics, but to meet growing life needs that their students bring through the classroom doors. The feeling increases when one considers the needs of the community within the church of today to whom these future Christian leaders will be called to minister.

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[1] Arthur R. Holmes, *Shaping Character* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) VI, VIII.

The questions to be addressed in this article are as follows. How can focusing networks contribute to and help with this challenging task of preparing future leaders? What essentials must be addressed, and in what way does the character of pastors need to change so they will be equipped to lead other Christians? Furthermore, how can this be accomplished in an institution which by its very nature tends to focus more on the head than the heart? These are some of the challenges seminaries face today.

The intention of this article is to focus on the role of seminaries in challenging students toward moral character formation through the use of focus groups as part of the preparation for future church ministry. Consideration will be given to the importance of network groups in the development of moral character and to the discoveries made when facilitating these networks during the last year. Because understanding the importance of forming network groups in seminary is dependent on the definition of morality and how it is formed in human beings, this is where we will begin.

I. MAJOR COMPONENTS OF THE MORAL LIFE AND MORAL FORMATION

In defining morality, we see it concerned with three things: (1) with fairness and harmony between individuals; (2) with harmonizing the things inside each individual; (3) with what man was created for or the purpose of life as a whole. The first has to do with relationships between people, the second has to do with being aware and understanding one's self, and the third has to do with purpose in relationship to the Creator. How a person responds throughout life to these three components forms his character. These components cannot be separated. Each one affects the other. Being fair and honest in our relationship with others is imbedded in the foundation of the self and relationship with God.[2]

Lewis likens it to a fleet of ships sailing in formation. First, all ships must be in proper position. For one ship to go off on its own would be to cripple another. Each ship must operate with all parts functioning properly. And finally, they need a purpose or destination. He says,

> What is the good of telling the ships how to steer so as to avoid collisions if, in fact, they are such crazy old tubs that they cannot be steered at all? What is the good of drawing up, on paper, rules for social behavior, if we know that in fact, our greed, cowardice, ill-temper, and self-conceit are going to prevent us from keeping them? . . . Without good men you cannot have a good society.[3]

Seminarians will become effective Christian leaders when they understand themselves, when their mind, will and emotions are working congruently, and when they understand their unique purpose in ministry. Unless they are aware of their destination, they will not know whether the parts within them (mind, will, and emotions) are in good working order. "It is in dealing with the

[2] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960) 71.
[3] Ibid. 72.

third that the main differences between Christian and non-Christian morality come out."[4]

Seminaries have to move beyond the basic understanding of morality as principles of social organization to discovering where moral behavior has its roots. The tendency is to try and change anti-social behavior instead of seeing morality as rooted in the individual human psyche. In seminary we tend to put most of our focus on learning and understanding our guide, the written Word of God, to provide the motivation to keep the parts within oneself in good working order. What we often fail to do is to look at the "old tub" and see what we need to do to repair the leaks and weak spots. Students entering seminary today are carrying dysfunctional baggage emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. Today, we no longer seem to know what vice and virtue are, we are weaker in the knowledge of morality, and for the first time in history we have lost objective moral law. Moral relativism and subjectivism are the reigning orthodoxy of intellectual culture, and moral values have become both privatized and collectivized. Morality is subjective and a matter of private feelings versus beliefs.[5]

We see this attitude of compartmentalization in the students entering seminary today. They profess to believe in God and live by his laws, but in actuality, many are struggling with secret sins of sexuality, addiction, lying, etc., and with no community in which to be accountable. Freedom is perhaps the most resonant, deeply held American value, yet freedom turns out to mean being left alone by others, not having other people's values, ideas or styles of life forced upon one. Freedom used to mean the power to do what I ought, now it means the right to do what I want. This progress of individualism moves quickly into fragmentation.[6] It is this fragmentation of the self that we see in students entering seminary today. Emotionally, they need to be given a safe atmosphere to release the grief over what they have not received because of the fragmentation of their families of origin who too were caught up in the self-oriented individualistic society.

What most Christian families see as crisis factors are pornography, drugs, and secular humanism. These things let Christians off the hook and place the enemy outside our family camp. Yet this kind of analysis does not go deep enough. We fail to look beneath the issues to ask what causes them or how our society contributes to them.[7] So our students are not only emotionally handicapped but relationally as well. They are deficient in the basics of relationship: trust, love, self esteem, power, and identity. Not only are they deficient in these basics, but they are left in a vacuum with no resources with which to begin the healing process. Many come to seminary in ignorance, for the very purpose of finding mentors who will introduce these elements into

[4] Ibid. 73.

[5] P. Kreeft, *Back to Virtue: Traditional moral wisdom for modern moral confusion* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992) 20–25.

[6] R. N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985) 23.

[7] R. Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads: Beyond traditional and modern options* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993) 52.

their lives. The emptiness is felt but not understood. This leaves them spiritually desperate, wanting but not knowing how (or not feeling worthy enough) to connect with God.

The field of "prosocial behavior" suggests four human acquisitions that show morality formation as being deeply rooted in the human psyche. The first acquisition is empathy, which is acquired very early, if not genetically wired into human nature. The second is a primary human value, namely, a caring and mutually supportive relationship with another person. Good relationships with other people are the most important outcome of a social system.[8] Third, people basically want to think of themselves as decent, fair, and moral as their self-concept within their personality system develops, and that is at least part of their motivation to be moral.[9] And fourth, humans develop an increasingly richer and more penetrating picture of the social world by reflecting upon their own social experience. Some even develop ideal visions of society based on their own more complicated inferences and encompassing plans. These four acquisitions show that there are natural tendencies in individual human development in which moral development is rooted.[10]

These tendencies can support moral development or can be channeled in other directions, become distorted, or be preempted by other tendencies. For example, "empathy can become prejudice, intimate relationships can become constrictive, the evolving self-concept system can organize itself around nonmoral values, and sophistication in social cognition can be used for exploitation as well as for moral purposes."[11] It is these very issues about which seminaries have to be concerned when encouraging the intentional character formation of students. The question begging to be answered is, have the experiences prior to seminary, particularly early formational experiences, developed these four acquisitions of empathy, human value, a healthy self concept, and an increasingly richer picture of the world? Even more importantly, have they been channeled in a direction that was not distorted or preempted by other self-oriented values? Apparently not, because as stated before, seminarians today are struggling with many moral issues.

Not only are they struggling with these foundational acquisitions, but as a consequence they are having difficulty with the four psychological processes that occur in order for moral behavior to take place, namely, moral sensitivity, judgment, motivation, and implementation skills.[12] Let's look at these four processes more closely.

First, in order to behave morally, a person must be able to make some sort of interpretation of a particular situation in terms of what actions are possible, who would be affected by each course of action, and how each party would regard such effects on their welfare. Churches in crisis today have the

[8] James R. Rest, *Moral Development* (New York: Praeger, 1986) 1.

[9] Augusto Blasi, "Moral Identity: Its role in moral functioning," *Moral Development: A Compendium* (ed. Bill Puka; Vol. 2; New York: Garland, 1994) 172.

[10] Rest, *Moral Development* 2.

[11] Ibid. 2–3.

[12] Ibid. 3.

reputation of kicking out their wounded and forgetting to consider how others are affected or will be affected.

Secondly, a person must be able to make a judgment about which course of action is morally right, thereby labeling one possible action as what one "ought" to do on the situation. People readily make moral judgments (or at least have intuitions about right and wrong), which comes early in development. People differ dramatically as to what's right and wrong, but they have great certainty about their moral convictions.[13]

Cognitive developmental psychologists (including Piaget and Kohlberg) have made important contributions in finding out people's strategies for defining right and wrong which will not be discussed here. Two studies seem relevant to seminaries. One study by Kohlberg indicates that allegiance to belief systems and ideologies can override the influence of a person's own sense of fairness in making decisions of moral rightness. When looking at the failure rate of Christian pastors, one then has to question their allegiance to their belief system and ideology. Other concepts on which to base morality are "agape love," Gilligan's "different voice," or different cultures developing their moral sense in ways different from people in Western culture. This area definitely needs more exploration and research as we train leaders from other cultures.

Now that a person has labeled one course of action as the morally right one, component three involves giving priority to moral values above other personal values, so that there is motivation to do what is morally right. Personal values such as career advancement, blind ambition, personal satisfaction, etc., also motivate people. Therefore, what makes a person choose to do the moral good? Theorists have proposed many motivations from genetic inheritance, empathy, conscience, caring relationships, or concern for one's identity. There is a diversity of views, and more research needs to be done to assess the motive strength in a given situation, but as Christians, should not our choice already have been made? Isn't our choice always to be what brings glory to God? This motivation to have God's glory be the supreme guide should come from the foundational images of moral good introjected by our primary caretakers in childhood. Our very purpose then becomes our motivation for moral good. If a Christian's choice is anything other than the moral good, one has to question his or her purpose.

The final component of the psychological processes for moral behavior to occur is for a person to have sufficient perseverance, ego strength, and implementation skills to be able to follow through on his or her intention to behave morally. This involves executing and implementing an action notwithstanding fatigue, flagging will, and existing obstacles. The very strengths needed for this implementation of moral behavior are those which Christian leaders are lacking. Their time commitments and plethora of responsibilities drain their perseverance, ego strength, and skills. The seminary must train the church's future leaders on how to guard against the very sapping of energy needed for consistent moral choices. This component underscores the

[13] Ibid.

need for Christian leaders to maintain a growing posture within a community that will keep him or her accountable so that they develop the strength to overcome the weaknesses of the flesh.

Before moving on, we need to note several things about his model. First, it denies that moral development or moral behaviors are the result of any single process but rather an interaction of the four components. Any one of the components may constitute a strength for a person who may demonstrate a weakness in another component. Some people may be able to make sophisticated judgments but never take action. Or someone might take action, but his or her judgment may have been too simplistic. This is another good reason for continued education and accountability in a Christian leader's weak areas.

Second, there are no moral cognitions completely devoid of affect, and no moral affects completely devoid of cognitions, and no moral behavior separable from the cognitions and affects that prompt the behavior. So the basic elements of morality are not posed in terms of cognition, affect, and behavior. Consequently, each of the four component processes involves interactions of both cognition and affect, and the behavior that issues from them. This is a good reason for seminaries to have training, not only of the head, but also of the heart.

Third, the four components do not represent general traits or virtues of people, rather the processes involved in the making of a moral act in a particular situation. This again is good reason for support and accountability of a Christian leader's community, because the existence of a virtue or belief may be professed to be present but certain situations may test its endurance. These communities need to be modeled by Christian educators and be available for students.

Last, the four components are not in linear sequence in time. Instead, research has shown that there is a complicated interaction among the components for moral behavior to occur. This means that for a Christian leader, having the right beliefs is important, but it is not always the determining factor in making a moral decision.

Rest's four component model has some real assets, particularly because of the integration of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral components. It moves the seminary away from either a head or heart approach and helps students instead look at each decision to determine how their choice was made. This makes Rest's model both practical for assessment and less controversial.

Now that morality has been defined and the formation of morality understood, we need to examine the strengths and weaknesses of seminaries in encouraging the continuation of the formation of the Christian character of their students.

II. APPLICATION IN SEMINARIES

This section will include the defining of moral character, what is involved in moral education, what part involves the formation of character, why seminaries need to get involved, and what seminarians are or are not already do-

ing in each of these areas of moral education. There are eleven objectives that moral education in a Christian context should include. These eleven objectives are divided into three phases by Holmes.[14]

Phase I (Conscience)	Phase II (Decision Making)	Phase III (Character)
1. Consciousness-raising and sensitizing	Moral Imagination	Responsible Action
2. Values analysis and clarification	Ethical Analysis	Virtues
3. Values concern	Moral decision-making	Moral identity

I believe all three phases need to be addressed in seminaries for thorough moral education. When looking at these phases, seminary education is meeting the objectives of the first two phases quite consistently throughout its current curriculum. Issues of the day are discussed for consciousness-raising and sensitizing, values are analyzed, moral and ethical implications are discussed along with making good moral decisions. But the responsible action motivated by a virtuous moral identity, namely, character, is taken for granted. As Christians, we tend to assume that being a Christian means that our students have a responsible moral identity. It may even be assumed that when a person is born again through faith in Christ, his or her character is also given instant new birth and is changed to conform to Christ's image. The process of sanctification may be taught, but it is not often considered in relation to a student's moral identity.

Rather, "character" refers to something cut or engraved into an object that marks it unmistakably for what it is. So it is with moral character. It persists day after day regardless of what happens. It is not occasional behaviors or intentions, but it is what I am solidly through and through, a matter of the heart. There is a connection between a believer's character and conduct. Character is the kind of person one is, and conduct is the acts of a person that reflect his character. Integrity, then, is the congruence between the two or between doing and being.[15]

Character is developed throughout a person's lifetime, but the foundations of character, as Aristotle knew, is laid in the moral training of childhood through the habits that were formed by authority and discipline. Then, in adolescence, the method changes, and Aristotle points out that behavioral habits must be developed by choice.

Students admitted to seminary and most universities come from a variety of home backgrounds and developmental experiences. Of those who graduate, very few fail in ministry because of inability to study, think, teach, or preach—the skills and content we focus on in seminary. Failure in ministry is linked to difficulties in character, relationships, emotions, spiritual maturity, and other character problems.

[14] Holmes, *Shaping Character* 25.
[15] Ibid. 61.

Effective ministry also flows out of being. Each student in seminary is there to become a leader. Leadership is influential. Godly influence comes from a leader's spiritual authority. Leaders who will be effective will have learned to become intentional about their personal walk with God. The long-term fruit of a ministry is related to the spiritual formation of those involved.

When Christians are unaware of the Holy Spirit's working in their lives, they explain formative experiences from a purely experiential perspective. They then protect their wounds and deficits to maintain a sense of continuity and competence, hoping eventually to overcome and be good enough to be used by God. Energy goes to covering inadequacies and to self-protection, so that they are not free to hear the Holy Spirit's leading and become the person he wants to form in their lives.

Rather, competence needs to be built on the foundation of belonging and worthiness. It is through knowing that we are wanted and believing that we are worthy that competence can blossom. If this foundation is kept strong within a community that is vulnerable, authentic, and holds one to be accountable, then competence guided by the Holy Spirit is the result without the need for coercive performance, covering inadequacies, or self protection.

In conjunction with Rest and moving beyond him, one needs continuity in one's inner life, including beliefs, values, thinking, and feelings (called interactional reality by Hauerwas).[16] This continuity becomes the motivator of moral agency. It is developed through the process of sanctification. Sanctification leads a person step by step in character formation. Some of Hauerwas's conclusions are important here to answer not only the question of why seminaries need to be involved in character formation but how they should involve themselves.

First of all, the formation of the Christian life is not just a matter of the principles that can be derived from the Gospel. The more significant questions of the Christian life are how we come to understand the nature of God and his intentions for us as revealed in Christ.[17] The Christian life that is in the process of sanctification should be marked by changes in the self that are seen in a person's works. The conclusion to be drawn here is that it is important for seminarians to be able to see that process as happening in their lives both in the past and the present, so that they are motivated to discover it in the future.

Second, self agency, wholeness, and compassion have greater potential if motivated by community rather than by law. Seminary, in particular, is a community that must encourage the internal self to be congruent with beliefs, so that a person grows in self agency and other virtues of Christian character formation. Leaders who experience moral failure do so because of their lack of continuity and a community in which continuity can flourish. There are many opportunities to discuss beliefs in seminary but few opportu-

[16] Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975) 11; idem, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) 2.

[17] Hauerwas, *Community of Character* 212.

nities to discuss how these beliefs are integrated into the life developmental structures from early childhood experiences that involve affect and behavior. This leads to students using their capacities for moral agency for hiding the incongruencies they know and feel are there internally.

Finally our moral history is significant because it provides our orientation rather than that which we can rely on in and of itself.[18] Seminaries need to be a place where future leaders can explore their moral history so they can better understand the strengths and weaknesses of that history in relationship to God's commands. If only God's principles are explored and learned, they become a cover-up or defense against their weaknesses, and moral acts are a performance. Consequently, true spiritual growth does not happen.

Clinton and Leavenworth also suggest five enhancements toward fin-ishing well, namely, maintaining a lifetime perspective on ministry, experiencing times of personal renewal, practicing spiritual disciplines, developing a lifelong learning posture, and being involved in the relational process of mentoring.[19] Let's look at how these practices can begin with the training one receives in seminary which can develop habits that can be carried into a lifelong practice within a leader's life.

III. THE USE OF FOCUSING NETWORKS IN SEMINARY

Talbot School of Theology's newly formed intentional character formation program attempts to accomplish phase three objectives of Holmes' proposed moral education. Phase three involves encouraging students toward initiating responsible action motivated by a virtuous moral identity, namely, character. This is being accomplished through the medium of focus network groups. The program challenges each student to see his or her formative experiences as the raw material God wants to redeem and use to form him or her into the person he wants each to be and the leader he can use in ministry.

Starting the fall of 1995 we began implementing character formation at Talbot School of Theology. Each following semester changes have been made and revisions have taken place after student and faculty evaluative efforts were discussed. The process I will be presenting here is what took place in the fall of 1996 in three classes of twenty students each. Every new entry student is now required to take part in this program in the first or second semester after enrollment in seminary.

The class format is small groups of five students each with a facilitator or mentor in each group and a faculty member leading the class which meets for 110 minutes per week. The following will be a description of the components of the class.

1. Formation of small groups: This takes place during the first three weeks of class. The process begins with the teacher modeling his or her own family sculpture. Family sculptures are then created by each student in front of class using members of the class to represent his or her family members.

[18] Ibid. 161.

[19] Richard Clinton and Paul Leavenworth, *Starting Well* (Alta Dena, CA: Barnabas, 1994) 16–19.

They are to depict their family of origin's life at age 10. Classmates not only participate, but begin to recognize that no family is perfect and every student is carrying some pain which needs resolution and reconciliation. After a student completes their sculpture, the class is asked to respond to what they see and then the student tells the class about his or her family. After all the sculptures are completed for that day, groups are formed for prayer and ministry to the students who presented their sculptures. Each week they are asked to pray with a different group until the last week of sculptures, when they choose their permanent group for the rest of the year. Family sculptures, we have found, are met at first with some fear by the students, but when completed, become a great bonding and growing experience with rich ministry taking place between classmates. Groups seem to form naturally as the Holy Spirit brings different students together.

Mentors for the small groups are enrolled in a mentorship class which meets an hour per week to discuss mentoring, and help is given them with any particular small group issues that may come up throughout the semester. These mentors are chosen by the faculty out of students who have been through the program previously. They commit to staying with their group of students for the period of one year or two semesters. The first semester they are in the class and the second semester they meet with their group once a week for the lab which is required as a follow-up to the class. This lab requirement has now been in place since the fall of 1997.

These small groups are a critical part of the whole program, because it provides the community in which safety, confidentiality, accountability, and vulnerability become key aspects for the growth and nurture of character and spiritual formation of the students.

2. Reading requirements: Each student is required to read a chapter or two per week of *Inside Out* by Larry Crabb, *Changes That Heal* by Henry Cloud, and *Starting Well* by Richard Clinton and Paul Leavenworth. They are given questions to guide their thinking as they read the books.

3. Personal History: Each student is required to journal a single-spaced page or two of their personal history each week. Questions are given them in advance to which they write their responses from their history. This helps students recall and become cognizant of the importance of their personal history. These are read and responded to by the professor who keeps this information confidential.

4. Personal Journal: A personal one or two-page single-spaced journal is turned in weekly reflecting their thoughts about anything that they would like to discuss from class material. This too is responded to by the professor and is held in confidence.

5. Assessment: A personal assessment needs to be completed by the sixth week of class which includes a 16PF, and MMPI, and IDAK. Love-Power is completed by any student who is married or in a committed relationship. It is completed by both the student and their spouse.

6. Clinical Interview: Each student completes their MMPI at the Biola Counseling Center and makes a follow-up appointment with a counselor at

the center to discuss the results of their test. Many students find themselves choosing to begin a counseling process with this interview.

7. Interview with the Professor: After completing the assessment, each student writes up a five-page summary of their findings which becomes a part of their final paper. Then each student has an interview with the professor for the results of the 16PF and a discussion of strengths, weaknesses, and unresolved issues that need accountability.

8. Final Paper: The summary of their assessment findings is followed by their values, purpose statement, and follow-up plan of accountability throughout seminary.

9. Book Review: Each student needs to choose a self help book in his or her area of weakness, do a critique of the book to give to other members of the class, and do a five-minute in-class presentation of how the book impacted his or her life. This assignment helps expand a future pastor's resources of help for others.

10. Class Lectures: The time in class is focused on the refocusing material written by Terry Walling (1995) which helps students in developing their own time line and periods of spiritual development, discovering their values, writing a personal mission statement and creating a vision for their future ministry. This is all processed in their small group which builds community and teaches accountability. Ultimately the questions they answer are "Where have you been?" "Where are you going?" and "Who will help you get there?" We hope the follow-up lab will keep them connected to their focus group for accountability for what they have discovered rather than having to repress all they discovered about themselves at the end of the semester. We pray that a year-long process will form habits of personal journaling, spiritual renewal, and accountability.

IV. DISCOVERIES MADE IN DEVELOPING FOCUSING NETWORKS IN SEMINARY

My number one discovery is that students are hungry for relationship. Many have never had the experience of an intimate nurturing relationship in their life. Others have had it but long to have more and don't know where to get it. Performance and achievement become the way to try and meet the longing for relationship they are experiencing. Even their relationship to God is often one of performance even though they know they are saved by grace and not works.

Students often come to seminary for the purpose of developing a closer walk with God and his people. When they don't receive spiritual growth experiences, they find that seminary becomes a very dry time in their lives.

Another discovery I have made is that the ministry time with these students is rich and redemptive. Many have come to say that this was a life-changing experience for them. But in order for this kind of growth to continue in the lives of these students, all faculty members need to understand and take part in what is being done in the lives of these students and change their teaching to integrate the "being" part of all seminarians.

In looking at the development of intentional character formation in seminaries it is also important that the following four areas be considered for implementation. First, there must be comprehensive participation throughout the community pertaining to both content and methodology. Second, methodologies should include inculcating and modeling values, stressing responsible decision-making and other life skills. Third, developing morality, especially character, needs to be part of the overall mission statement of the seminary which would then carry over into all activities of seminary life. And finally, families and the community must be made aware of what the seminary is doing and be involved in any way they can, either by bringing spouses and families into the school or by bringing students into the community to exercise moral agency.[20]

Let's take a closer look at what each of these guidelines would mean for seminaries. First, this new methodology would mean that seminaries would need to be less content and program-driven and more student-driven. The needs of the student would have to determine in part what the program would consist of, particularly in areas that would address character formation.

Secondly, character formation would need to be at the core of the seminary. Seminaries would need to see themselves as communities with a distinctive moral vision. Rather than being institutions where just a degree is earned, they would need to become communities of involvement, commitment, care, and responsibility. Seminary has not traditionally been a place that is congenial to nurturing spiritual growth, and this must change.

Third, seminaries would need a place to engage their moral agency beyond seminary. Community involvement would be crucial for them in carrying out their vision. Most seminarians are involved in church ministry, but character development includes developing a richer and more in-depth world view. A person has to move beyond their own community in order for this to happen. Christians often get too comfortable in their own world, failing to fulfill the great commission to reach out to the unsaved.

V. LESSONS LEARNED IN IMPLEMENTING THIS PROGRAM

1. Agenda in terms of lesson plan needs to be held loosely. Faculty and group mentors need to allow the Holy Spirit to do ministry.

2. Group mentors need empowering and mentoring throughout the network process.

3. Leading these networks and the class expends a lot of emotional energy.

4. Connecting with other teachers who are teaching other sections is a needed support.

5. My intimacy and connection with God affects this class more than others I have taught.

[20] Howard Kirschenbaum, "A Comprehensive Model for Values Education and Moral Education," *Phi Beta Kappan* 73, no. 10 (June, 1992) 771–776.

6. I have learned how important my authenticity and vulnerability are to empower both the mentors and students in the class.

7. I learned that it is more difficult to let go of these students, stronger connections are made than in other classes.

8. I learned that, for ultimate effectiveness, the support of the whole faculty is needed.

9. Follow-up is key, or else we may be doing more harm than good.

10. The process is contagious throughout the student body. Those who have had the experience tell others about it, and our classes are never lacking in students.

VI. CONCLUSION

Colby and Damon in *Some Do Care* identify characteristics of exemplars of morality. They say, "Where there is perceived concordance between self and morality, there will follow direct and predictable links between judgment and conduct as well as great certainty in the action choices that result."[21] This link between self and morality needs to become one of the greatest areas of concern for our seminaries. Many do not even believe the link is necessary or exists. Although moral failure of leaders in ministry is being seen more than ever before in our history, seminaries are still training in the areas of skills rather than character. We talk about living a life characterized after Jesus, having love for others, and having a heart for ministry, but we are still training the head and not encouraging the head to be connected to the heart.

This is crucial because ministry should flow out of our relationship with God at the core of our being. But the truth is that sin has damaged our ability to be in relationship with God, self, and others, and that must be our greatest concern. Doing what it takes to heal our ability to be in those relationships should be at the center of seminary life. Where is the weakness, in moral sensitivity, judgment, motivation, or skills? Our focus consistently needs to be on whatever is standing in the way of having empathy for others, thereby doing for others what God did for us. He gave us truth and grace encompassed in one man, His Son named Jesus. He needs to be our example, or everything we do will be a learned performance with no real healing power.

Why is it even more vital for seminaries? Because we have a crisis in America. We are training leaders as role models of families, churches, schools, and individuals who are the primary agents in the development of our country's morality. Whether a decent society will flourish or decay depends more on what families, churches, and schools do than on most of what goes on in congressional communities, the courts, state houses, or even the White House. Regeneration comes from within.[22] One of the ways we can take an individually oriented society into the boundaries of caring for others is by intentional character formation of its future leaders.

[21] Anne Colby and William Damon, *Some Do Care* (New York: Free Press, 1992) 304.

[22] William J. Bennett, *The De-Valuing of America* (New York: Summit, 1992) 23.

In summary, this paper has explored the role of seminaries in challenging students toward character development through the use of focus groups as part of the preparation for future church ministry. Although this subject needs further research, it also urgently needs to be implemented. We know God requires and desires faith *and* works. He gave us both truth *and* grace in the gift of his Son. Let us not wait any longer to carry out what God began in us at creation: an ability to begin the process of being reconciled to him, ourselves, and others.