

Benjamin D. Espinoza

“Pia Desideria” Reimagined for Contemporary Theological Education

Abstract

Phillip Spener’s pivotal work, *Pia Desideria* (1675), though written hundreds of years ago, still speaks to today’s Christian contexts, and creative engagement with the text can yield fruit when seeking to form sound ministry and educational practice. The purpose of this article is to creatively engage and re-imagine *Pia Desideria* in such a way that allows Spener’s six proposals for church reform to speak to theological educators today in Christian colleges and seminaries, specifically in the area of pedagogy.

Keywords: Theological education, Philip Spener, *Pia Desideria*, spiritual formation, pedagogy

Benjamin D. Espinoza serves as director of youth and community life at Covenant Church in Bowling Green, Ohio. He is a graduate (M.A., 2012), and former staff member of Asbury Seminary.

Introduction

In 1675, Philip Jakob Spener, a German Lutheran pastor and theologian, authored *Pia Desideria* ("The Piety We Desire"), a pivotal work that initiated the theological and ecclesial movement known as Pietism. When Spener wrote *Pia*, he did so to counter numerous theological and ecclesial issues facing German Lutheranism, including the bifurcation of roles between clergy and laity, a lack of biblical knowledge among church members, the priority of intellectual content in sermons, and a general apathy toward piety. Specifically, Spener offers six proposals for church reform that initiated Pietism and its daughter movements, such as the Moravians, Mennonites, and Methodists (Noll 2001:230-234). *Pia Desideria* still speaks to today's contexts (Heinemann 2004; Estep 2011), and creative engagement with the text can yield fruit when seeking to form sound ministry and educational practice. The purpose of this article is to creatively engage and reimagine *Pia Desideria* in such a way that allows Spener's six proposals for church reform to speak to theological educators today in Christian colleges and seminaries.

The Role of the Bible in Education and Spiritual Formation

Spener's first proposal to correct conditions in the German Lutheran church is that "Thought should be given to a more extensive use of the Word of God among us" (1964:87). He writes that "To this end, the Word of God is the powerful means, since faith must be enkindled through the gospel, and the law provides the rules for good works and many wonderful impulses to attain them. The more at home the Word of God is among us, the more we shall bring about faith and its fruits" (1964:87). Spener points out that the scriptures preached and recited on Sundays are minimal in the scheme of scripture, and that to truly grow as Christians, we must understand the entire Word of God (1964:88-89). Spener notes, "the people have little opportunity to grasp the meaning of the scriptures except on the basis of those passages which may have been expounded to them, and even less do they have opportunity to become as practiced in them as edification requires" (Spener 1964:88). He then advocates personal scripture readings, one book after the other, and that scripture be read aloud for a greater part of the service so that those who are illiterate or do not have a copy of the scriptures may be able to hear the Word of God (1964:89). Beyond these solutions, however, Spener advocates mutual edification through discussion of the scriptures, known as the *collegia pietatis* (1964:89). Of the *collegia pietatis*, Maschke (1992: 193) writes, "Their formation was intended to serve as an intermediary structure (between public preaching and private reading) for spiritual nurture." A large concern for Spener was the emphasis on a more technical reading of scripture as opposed to a devotional reading. Gangel

and Benson, describing Spener's concern, write, "Too much time . . . was given to the learning of Latin and not enough to Hebrew and Greek so that exegesis of the scriptures could be carried out. In short, there was too much dogma and too little devotion" (1983:173). Spener's clarion call to a more personal, devotional reading of scripture serves as a hallmark of Pietist thought, as Weborg argues that it was Pietism that gave the Bible to the people, not the Reformation (1986:205-206).

Cochran (2012) contends that in theological education today, there exists a tension between "scholarship," the critical study of the biblical text, and "discipleship," the use of biblical texts to form and shape one's spiritual formation. Particularly, Cochran's categories derive from David Kelsey's (1993) examination of the two schools of thought regarding the Bible in theological education: the "Athens" school and the "Berlin" school. The "Athens" school seeks to inculcate within students heart-deep transformation and knowledge of the Good, while the "Berlin" school is concerned with "cultivating the capacity to conduct scientific research" (Cochran 2011:127). Seeking to blend these differing schools of thought, Cochran notes that "At their best, discipleship is enhanced by the fruits of scholarship while providing moorings for scholarship in the praxis of the church in the world" (2011:129).

Based on this desire to integrate scholarship and discipleship in theological education, Cochran helpfully provides some pedagogical axioms which may aid in recovering the spirit of Spener's thoughts regarding the devotional role of the Bible in education. Alongside a critical reading of the Bible, Cochran first proposes that "*students need to taste contemplative approaches to reading Scripture*" (2011:133, italics original). He writes, "Blending scripture reading, contemplation, and dialogue with others in some mix has proven consistently to nurture the souls and shape the identities of participants" (Cochran 2011:133). Second, Cochran proposes that "*students need to appropriate the truths of scripture on their lived experience in light of scripture*" (2011:134, italics original). In order to accomplish this task in theological education, Cochran briefly argues that Groome's (1991) Shared Praxis Approach to Christian teaching would be an effective pedagogical measure. Cochran rightly summarizes Groome's thought by noting that "Shared Christian Praxis begins with inviting students to name and evaluate their present praxis, then leads them to place their own story on conversation with God's Story," the Bible (2011:135). By integrating these approaches to engaging the Bible in theological education, theological educators can allow ministerial students to study scripture on a devotional level as well as an academic one, much in the spirit of Spener.

Embracing Transformational Pedagogy

Spener's second proposal for ecclesial reform is "the establishment and diligent exercise of the spiritual priesthood" (1964: 92). Spener grounds this proposal in the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 5:10). Spener's primary concern is the bifurcation between clergy and laity, perpetuated by the Roman Catholic Church and unraveled by Martin Luther, Spener's theological inspiration (Spener 1964:92, 93). Spener writes that "Every Christian is bound not only to himself and what he has, his prayer, thanksgiving, good works, alms, etc.," and placing a primary emphasis on both individual and communal readings of scripture (1964:94). Practically, the work of ministry can be performed not solely by the vocational minister, but all Christians. In Spener's time, the promise of a visible spiritual priesthood was the true sign of reform (Spener 1964: 95). As McCallum notes, "Spener's ecclesiology had to do with the emancipation of the laity to do real ministry in the church" (1987:11).

While evangelicals typically excel in lay-driven church leadership, in some circles there exists a chasm between the theological educator and the theological student. At times, theological educators can fall prey to the traditional mode of education known as "banking," where "the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat," and the only "scope of action allowed to students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits" (Freire 2000:58). In "banking" education, "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (Freire 2000:60). Practically speaking, educators who primarily lecture with little attention to the questions or concerns of students are participating in the practice of "banking." Results of "banking" education include the equation of objective fact memorization with genuine internalization, the lack of engagement of ideas on the part of the learner, and the continued bifurcation between teacher and learner. None of these are desirable for the theological educator, as they diminish the importance of dialogue in the educational process and can lead to an incomplete education for ministerial students.

Jarvis (2005: 14) writes that "Education is fundamentally about individuals who learn, grow, and develop and not about merely transmitting knowledge. Learning is life-long, life-wise, and it plumbs the depth of human existence-in-the-world. We are always both being-in-the-world and becoming, developing, growing, and maturing." Theological educators would do well to revise their pedagogical approaches so they more reflect a spirit of equality and mutual learning, such as the approaches of andragogy and transformative learning theories (Knowles, Holton, and Swanson 2011; Mezirow 1991, 2001). Jack Mezirow, whose name is

most synonymous with transformative learning theory, writes that the role of an educator is to foster within students the capacity to acquire “skills, sensitivities, and understandings essential to become critically reflective of assumptions and to participate more fully and freely in critical-dialectical dialogue” (2003::62). Analyzing transformative learning theory in Christian perspective, Rhonda McEwan (2013:347) writes that “transformative learning provides more than just an effective educational methodology. It is an intentional effort at reframing our minds, hearts, and actions so that they are in closer alignment with the ethical principles and practices of God’s kingdom.” A transformational approach to theological education allows for creative engagement of students’ thoughts and emotions which enables them to more substantially integrate theological knowledge for the purpose of future use in ministerial practice. It minimizes the philosophical and theological chasm between teachers and students, pastors and laypeople, as Spener sought to solve.

The Use of Christian Practices in the Classroom

Spener notes in his third proposal that “the people must have impressed upon them and must accustom themselves to believe that *it is by no means enough to have knowledge of the Christian faith, for Christianity consists rather of practice*” (emphasis original, 1964:95). The specific practice Spener has in mind here is the practice of love. “If we can therefore awaken a fervent love among our Christians, first toward one another and then toward all men...and put this into practice, practically all that we desire will be accomplished. For all the commandments are summed up in love (Rom. 13:9)” (Spener 1964:96). For Spener, the heart must be examined in order to correct one’s motivation for participating in certain practices. Christians “must become accustomed not to lose sight of any opportunity in which they can render their neighbor a service of love, and yet while performing it they must diligently search their hearts to discover whether they are acting in true love or out of other motives” (Spener 1964: 97). Spener recommends that Christians invite a “confessor or some other judicious and enlightened Christian” into their lives in order to provide accountability in the Christian walk (Spener 1964: 97). For Spener, those theological educators who view their profession as simply the transmission of religious facts or pastoral skills practice a disservice to their ministerial students. Educating students in theological knowledge is a worthy and needed effort, however, excluding a healthy emphasis on practice and spiritual direction or mentoring diminishes the impact of a theological education.

In answering Spener’s critique, the use of Christian practices in the theological classroom can provide potentially transformative learning experiences for students, and can orient them toward regular engagement in ministry during

their studies. Christian practices are "*the things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs, in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the life of the world*" (Bass and Dykstra 2002:18, italics original). Dykstra writes "The church, as community in the power of the Spirit, has over the course of its history learned to depend on the efficacy of certain central practices and disciplines in nurturing faith and growth in the life of faith" (2005: 41). Practices create meaning, orient our hearts toward the things of God, and are attentive to the needs of the world. Examples of Christian practices include hospitality, keeping Sabbath, healing, doing justice, singing, and peacemaking, among others (Bass 2010; Bass & Briehl 2010; Foster 2002; Norris 2012; Volf and Bass 2001).

While the use of Christian practices has traditionally been confined to the walls of the church and the duties of ministry, theological educators are starting to recognize their potential in providing formative and distinctly Christian pedagogical experiences. In *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning* (Smith and Smith 2011), several professors infuse Christian practices into their coursework, demonstrating the power of Christian practices in not only educating students in theological knowledge, but forming them in the practices that shape their hearts. Smith and Smith's main concern is that scholarship related to the integration of faith and learning in Christian higher education (Marsden 1997; Noll 1994) has essentially neglected to critically engage the idea of a distinctively Christian pedagogy (Smith and Smith 2011:2-3). Thus, what is needed in Christian higher education is an integration of faith and pedagogy, an integration that Smith and Smith propose can be achieved through the use of Christian practices. Carolyne Call sought to implement practices of hospitality, fellowship, and testimony into her course on adolescent psychology (Smith and Smith 2011:61-79). Though it was a challenge to integrate these practices into her course, Call writes that this integration achieved pedagogical success in the areas of shared fellowship, individual testimony, and personal hospitality for both her and her students (Smith & Smith 2011:72-29). James K.A. Smith integrated practices of the church calendar and midday prayer into his course on social sciences' philosophical foundations. Allowing the liturgical calendar to dictate his coursework and beginning each class with a pre-written prayer gave him and his students a great appreciation for living by the rhythms of the church universal and engaging in a more formal life of prayer (Smith and Smith 2011:151). Using Christian Practices in the theological classroom can yield the benefit of producing students who are not only engaged in intellectual pursuits, but are also concerned with living *into* and living *out* the ideas put forth in class. Smith (2009) goes as far as to suggest that "we are what we love," and the use of Christian practices can enable people to grow in the life of faith in a way that goes

deeper than intellectual ascent through the orientation of our affections and drive toward the *telos* of godliness.

Conviction, Love, and Theological Debate

For his fourth proposal, Spener exhorts Christian leaders to engage in theological debate with charity while affirming core theological convictions. “*We must be aware how we conduct ourselves in religious controversies* with unbelievers and heretics. We must first take pains to strengthen and confirm ourselves, our friends, and other fellow believers in the known truth and protect them with great care from every kind of seduction. Then we must remind ourselves of our duty toward the erring” (Spener 1964:97, italics original). Heinemann aptly summarizes Spener’s corollary subproposals underneath this overarching proposal:

- (a) We should pray that God would enlighten the erring;
- (b) we should take pains not to offend our opponents;
- (c) we should modestly but firmly present the truth based on the Word of God
- (d) we should practice heartfelt love toward those with whom we dispute, even toward heretics and unbelievers, and
- (e) we should realize that only the holy love of God can take us beyond disputation to Christian unity. (2004:107)

Spener thus carefully crafts an approach to theological debate with aim toward demonstrating the charity of God to those who engage in such disputations. Note that Spener’s proposed approach to theological debate is devoid of an emphasis on the objective nature of the Christian faith. Instead, Spener encourages prayer, sensitivity, a modest yet firm grasp on Christian truth, heartfelt love toward those with whom we disagree, and the recognition that only God’s love can drive us toward unity. Deeter comments on Spener’s deeper thinking on this proposal, noting

“Spener seems to be confident that, once there was a genuine renewal of true Christian life and faith within each communion, there would then be discovered deeper grounds for confessional unity whereby the truths of the teachings of the whole Christian Church would encompass the truths of each particular communion without sacrificing any essentials. For as Spener wrote on one occasion, it means far more to be a Christian than to be a Lutheran or Calvinist” (1963:62).

With cultural lucidity, Heinemann writes, “In today’s culture wars and internecine Christian controversies, Spener’s counsel is sorely needed. The mishandling of conflict by Christians continues to damage their public witness” (2004:107). It is indeed a concern that theological educators can engage in rather

fruitless intellectual debates that do little other than to reinforce stereotypes and further entrench people in their particular modes of thinking. Dockery laments that "Often our opportunities to influence [the academy at large] are hampered less by our lack of rigorous thinking or coherent worldview proposals than by the bickering, distrust, and dissensions in the broader Christian community" (2008:104). Instead, Dockery adds, we need to "call for Christian academic communities to be agents of reconciliation both in a broken world and for a hurting church evidencing a unity of mind, spirit, and purpose" (2008:104). Dockery contends that Christians can engage in hearty debate over secondary theological issues (the age of the earth, soteriological issues, eschatology, gender roles, etc.) as long as they do not impinge on historic orthodoxy founded on the basis of the revelation of Jesus Christ and the Bible (2008:104-106). Theological debates between Christian scholars can be fruitful ventures, as they could potentially contribute to both broader academic knowledge and ecclesial reform.

However, while scholars such as Dockery appeal to shared core convictions about the nature of special revelation to support interdenominational dialogue, what about the issue of *interreligious* dialogue, where no shared conviction on revelation exists? In order to achieve fruitful dialogue between Christians and other religious adherents, Terry Muck posits a helpful missional theology of dialogue that resonates with Spener's concerns and can guide theological educators as they engage with other people of faith. First, a missional dialogue "is based on an orthodox recognition of God's revelation to all" (Muck 2011:191). Muck roots this proposal in the notion of *common grace*, specifically noting its effects. "All non-Christians we talk to have already seen or been impacted by God's presence, even though they may not recognize it as such" (2011:191). For Muck, common grace enables us to experience "mutual learning that takes place when those whom God has created, whether Christian or not, share with each other about the *logos spermatikos*, the *sensus divinitatis*, the many evidences of God's glory and how they are affecting our lives" (2011:191). Second, a missional theology of dialogue "must fully embrace Christian humility" (Muck, 2011:191). "Dialogue is based on a recognition that we do not know everything, and have much to learn" (Muck 2011:191). Muck grounds Christian humility in critical realism, holding in tension the fact that while absolute truth does exist, we as humans are incapable of knowing it perfectly (2011:192). Third, a missional theology of dialogue "must be grounded in a love of neighbor" (Muck 2011:192). "Dialogue cannot take place in a climate of hostility but only in a climate of love. Participants in interreligious dialogue may want to know and understand the other for various reasons, but those reasons must be seasoned with love," Muck acknowledges (2011:192). For Muck, it is

“unchristian” to engage in scholarly debates and inquiries without love (2011:192). Fourth and finally, a missional theology of dialogue “makes known to all involved our commitment to Christian witness” (Muck 2011:192). While noting that the Christian faith is exclusive, Muck writes that “Meaningful dialogue takes place among people who are crystal clear about their strongly held convictions, whatever they are, not among people who claim some sort of preternatural openness to everything” (2011:192). Theological educators will do well to engage in theological debate that carries with it a fine balance between conviction regarding the exclusive claims of the Christian faith and a genuine love for all humanity. This not only encourages a healthy witness toward postmodern society, but also demonstrates humility and holiness to ministerial students.

The Model of The Theological Educator

Spener’s fifth proposal is especially pertinent to our discussion in this essay. In his fifth proposal, Spener argues for a theological education that continuously spurs ministerial students on to holiness of heart and godly character. He writes that theological institutions should be “recognized from the outward life of the students to be nurseries of the church for all estates and as workshops of the Holy Spirit rather than places of worldliness and indeed of the devils of ambition, tipping, carousing, and brawling” (Spener, 1964:103). He especially exhorts theological professors to “conduct themselves as men who have died unto the world,” and in everything, “seek not their own glory, gain, or pleasure but rather the glory of their God and the salvation of those entrusted to them, and would accommodate all their studies, writings of books, lessons, lectures, disputations, and other activities to this end” (Spener 1964:104). Thus, for Spener, the character formation of future clergy greatly depended upon the model set forth by their professors, and that the *telos* of a theological education should be development of pious intellectual leaders as opposed to spiritually apathetic intellectuals. Spener further argues that students of theology “should unceasingly have it impressed upon them that holy life is not of less consequence than diligence and study, indeed that study without piety is worthless” (1964:104).

Setran et al. share a similar sentiment to Spener, lamenting that

Faculty members frequently view themselves as objective disseminators of factual information, communicating data dispassionately so as to retain an appropriate scholarly distance. Value-laden Christian practices and soul formation are thought to take place in other settings, such as chapel,

discipleship small groups, dormitory discussions, and specialized programs implemented by student development professionals. As Christians, faculty members often desire to play a role in student spiritual growth. Yet they often believe that such influence should be placed in co-curricular settings or in one-on-one mentoring conversations. (2010:404)

Spener's exhortations ring as equally true in twenty-first century theological education as they did in the seventeenth. In theory, we may prize the attainment of a life of godliness as the *telos* of a richly formative theological education, but in practice, it is tough to remove ourselves from rational indicators of success such as grades, extracurricular accomplishments, and intellectual potential. While the realities of assessment, accreditation, and curriculum controls mandate the use of these external markers of success, theological educators are nonetheless tasked with modeling the pursuit of learning and holiness to their students, impressing upon them the need for thoughtful, pious living. Thus, the role that the character of theological educators plays in the intellectual and spiritual formation of students cannot be understated. As Carroll et al. write,

Faculty members are powerful agents in the educational process, not functionaries. Their roles are complex and multifaceted: their ingrained patterns of speech and movement, long-established attitudes toward others and feelings about themselves, and deeply rooted convictions and commitments have at least as much to do with what students take away from the school as any syllabuses and lecture notes. (1997: 273-274)

David Dockery exhorts theological educators to model for their students not only a healthy intellectual curiosity, but a propensity toward ethical works as well. Noting the classic adage, "What hath Athens to do with Jerusalem?" Dockery writes,

Rather, we should recognize the Augustinian tension and seek to live in both Jerusalem and Athens as a Christian academic community representing Christ *to* and *in* the world. Living in this tension means that we need to recognize that we not only need serious Christian thinking, but we need to encourage modeling of service in the world. If we want to be a grace-filled community, we must model grace. If we want to produce love, we model love. If we want to emphasize justice, we must model justice. (2008:111)

Thus the theological educator is tasked with being the embodiment of Christian virtue to the impressionable theological student. Simply put, one of the strongest, most effective forms of transformational pedagogy is simply to be a holy exemplar to one's students. In doing so, theological educators earn the right to claim as the apostle Paul claimed, "And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1, ESV).

Educating Practical Theologians

Spener writes,

In addition to these exercises [the first five proposals], which are intended to develop the Christian life of the students, it would also be useful if the teachers made provision for practice in those things with which the students will have to deal when they are in the ministry. For example, there should be practice at times in instructing the ignorant, in comforting the sick, and especially in preaching, where it should be pointed out to students that everything in their sermons should have edification as the goal. I therefore add this as a sixth proposal whereby the Christian church may be helped to a better condition: that *sermons* be so prepared by all that their purpose (faith and its fruits) may be achieved in the hearers to the greatest possible degree. (Spener 1964:115)

Against the cold intellectual Lutheranism of his day, Spener makes a passionate plea that the ministry of preaching become a more *practical* exercise. While he does note that there is no lack of sermons preached in his day (Spener 1964:115), the church people found many sermons to be wanting. Pastors in that era were more concerned with providing an intellectual exercise that was theologically coherent and methodically flawless, but were less concerned that the content of their sermons were "developed in such a way that the hearers may profit from the sermon in life and death" (Spener 1964:115). He continues by noting, "The pulpit is not the place for an ostentatious display of one's skill. It is rather the place to preach the Word of the Lord plainly but powerfully. Preaching should be the divine means to save the people, and so it is proper that everything be directed to this end" (1964: 116).

While the ministry of preaching should be a careful exercise in thorough exegesis and theological reflection, the crafting of sermons needs to speak into the lives of everyday people. While Spener narrowly engages the topic of homiletics, the implications for all sorts of ministry practices are apparent. Is it our primary goal to train students in the diligent reading of theological texts and methodological

carefulness, or do we acknowledge the need for these practices while gearing students toward listening to the deep needs of those in their congregations?

Practical theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore, writing of the business of a practical theologian in the collegiate classroom, notes,

She must first introduce students to the curriculum as a whole and to the wider goal of maturation in the practice of ministry and then, because they leave, test their capacity for academic, ministerial, and vocational integrity, ensuring they have learned something transportable for their ministry. She cannot ignore what students will do after graduation with the texts they study, the papers they write, and the class lectures they hear. Inescapably she must keep an eye on the wise horizon of Christian practice. (2008: 174)

It is not enough to teach the skills of exegesis and theological interpretation; rather, the imparting of these skills to future ministers must be paired with an eye toward the practical.

This is where the discipline of practical theology can assist theological educators in inculcating within their students the skills of listening to the lives of those within their congregations. Ray Anderson, the late professor of practical theology at Fuller Seminary, writes that "Practical theology, as critical and constructive reflection on ecclesial praxis, is the process of ongoing critical reflection on the acts of the church in the light of the gospel and in critical dialogue with secular sources of knowledge with a view to the faithful transformation of the praxis of the church in the world" (2001:59). In a manner similar to Anderson, Duncan Forrester writes,

The practical theologian is concerned with the practice of God, with discerning what God is doing in the world; with human behaviour considered theologically; with the being and activity of the church; with the practice of Christians; and finally with what for too long virtually monopolized the interest of practical theologians, ministerial practice, the activities of the ordained ministry and other ecclesiastical functionaries. (1999:22)

In essence, what these two definitions boil down to is that practical theology is a discipline concerned with how theology interprets and shapes ministry contexts. While some may view practical theology as a discipline devoid of theological reflection, the core of practical theology is theological reflection on current ministry contexts with an aim toward the transformation of those contexts.

Princeton Seminary scholar Richard Osmer (2001:xv-xvi; 2008:4) has put forth a model of practical theological interpretation which helps congregational leaders bridge the gap between theory and practice and aids in the skills of everyday ministry. In his model, there are four distinct tasks, which overlap and complement the others:

1. The Descriptive-Empirical Task
2. The Interpretative Task
3. The Normative Task
4. The Pragmatic Task

In the descriptive empirical task, the congregational leader asks “what is going on” in the congregation? (Osmer 2008:4). This entails understanding the current ministry context and taking into account all the factors therein. In the interpretative task, the leader asks “why is this going on?” (Osmer, 2008:4). In this task, the leader analyzes the underpinnings of the situation, seeking to gain a stronger perspective of the foundational issues that have caused the congregation’s present action. In the normative task, the congregational leader asks, “what ought to be going on?” (Osmer 2008:4). This task inquires scripture, theology, and church history in order to establish a correct way of being and thinking for the congregation. The pragmatic task asked the question, “How might we respond?” (Osmer 2008:4). This is where theological reflection infiltrates the ministry context through transforming leadership, best practices, and congregational commitments.

Briefly teaching this model of practical theology to ministerial students would have several benefits. First, ministry students would have a viable model for implementing many of the biblical and theological resources they have learned in seminary, such as biblical exegesis and theology. Whereas many students are left with learning the art of ministry “on the job,” this model provides them with a proper methodology for practicing ministry that is theologically faithful and contextually relevant. Second, ministry students would understand the need for becoming enmeshed with their current congregational and cultural context. How can a student, fresh out of an M.Div. or M.A. program, minister effectively in a new congregation when s/he is unaware of the congregation’s context? Third, teaching practical theology is a means of bridging the gap between the church and the academy, a focal aim of many professors in Christian higher education. When students leave seminary, their professors will most likely never hear from them again. However, to bridge the gap between church and academy, ministers must keep one eye on the latest theological trends coming out of the academy, and one on the direction and needs of the congregation. Theological educators thus will do

well in teaching Osmer’s model of practical theology to ministerial students who seek the transformation of the contexts in which they will minister.

Conclusion

To conclude in the spirit of Spener, I offer six proposals for pedagogical reform in theological education:

1. The Bible must maintain a central place in the theological classroom, not simply as an academic text to be studied, but as sacred Scripture to be engaged and internalized—regardless of the discipline being taught.
2. Professors refrain from the use of “banking” education—those forms of education that assume the teacher is the dispenser of knowledge and the student an empty receptacle for knowledge to be stored. Instead, theological professors must utilize pedagogical methods that equalize teacher and student, and creatively engage all dimensions of students’ lives.
3. Christian practices become a major component in the theological classroom, seeking to form students in Christian character and virtue, and orienting them toward the *telos* of godliness.
4. Theological educators engage in interdenominational and interreligious dialogue with conviction cradled with love and openness to new perspectives with scholarly humility.
5. Theological educators are models of holiness and virtue to their students, thereby broadening their role as more than simply a teacher, but as an exemplar of the godly life.
6. Theological educators bear the responsibility of educating their students to become practical theologians—ministers who allow theological realities to shape cultural contexts.

Spener’s six proposals as outlined in *Pia Desideria* are timeless. The renewal of biblical reading, attention to the devotional life of ministerial students, and the preaching of relevant sermons are all exhortations which each new generation of Christian leaders desperately need to hear. While this essay is tailored toward those teaching in higher education settings, the church universal could benefit from greater attention to the proposals found in *Pia Desideria*. As theological educators, we have much work to do in reforming the current state of theological education, but by allowing historical works such as this to shape our life and practice, we are well on our way

to becoming teachers who prize rich engagement with the biblical text, Christian practices, character formation, and the training of practical theologians.

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