ASSESSING EPISTEMOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG

EVANGELICAL SEMINARIANS

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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by

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November 2016

**APPROVAL SHEET**

ASSESSING EPISTEMOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG

EVANGELICAL SEMINARIANS


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I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Jennifer, and our sons, William and Jackson. This milestone would not have been possible, nor wise, without their sacrificial encouragement and understanding.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATS     Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada

CSID   Center for the Study of Intellectual Development

MID     Measure of Intellectual Developmen

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PREFACE

Now I know why prefaces tend to be so lengthy. A project of this size and scope demands things that no one person could ever possibly provide. It is truly a group effort, and for that reason, this has been one of the best growth experiences of my life. It has uncovered my spiritual, intellectual, and professional needs in ways that have been a revelation to me.

This thesis is the culmination of an educational journey that started and continued for many years with my parents and the wise choices and substantial provisions they made for me from infancy to adulthood. I am tremendously grateful to Gordon and Mary Stuckert for the ways they prioritized Christian education in our home and in our public lives.

I have been encouraged and prayed for by Christ Community Church in Kennesaw, Georgia and the elders with whom I serve on the session. I particularly want to acknowledge these godly men and the impact they have had on me and my spiritual growth: Cameron Barham, Tim Falkins, Phillip Lucas, Marc Start, Bill Tippins, and Paul Wagoner.

Dr. John David Trentham served as my adviser and guide from the first call that I made to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and Dr. Timothy Paul Jones and Dr. Michael Wilder have created an outstanding Doctor of Education program for which they should be proud. Learning in community is a huge emphasis of the program, and I was certainly blessed to have these peers in my cohort: Carol Brown, Kristen Ferguson, Aaron Filippone, Justin Glenn, Nathan Gunter, Jeff Horner, Dale Leatherman, Kevin McGaughey, Chuck Mielke, Mark Rasor, and Matt Thomas.

journey. I am much richer for having had the opportunity to listen to you.

<div align="right">Jonathan Stuckert</div>

Marietta, Georgia

November 2016

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH PROBLEM

This study enters into an ongoing conversation. In fact, it enters into more than one running dialogue. In its theoretical basis, it will join the wide range of voices concerned with the intellectual development of young adults, especially those in the process of higher education. In a more narrow sense, this study engages with and contributes to the community of scholars who have built upon the work of William Perry and have profitably used his scheme of epistemic stages to describe human cognitive development.[1] In an even more immediate sense, it builds on the work of John David Trentham[2] and those who have been privileged to be his doctoral advisees.[3]

Another target conversation is taking place. In North America, seminary studies are the typical route for persons who desire to serve the church in a significant, public role. Those involved in theological education recognize the great importance of this type of graduate education as it relates to the student, the constituencies being served,

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[1]The most seminal and referenced work is William G. Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), but other short pieces given by Perry at conferences and other venues will be used to inform the analysis and use of the Perry Scheme.

[2]John David Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates: A Cross Institutional Application of the Perry Scheme" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012).

[3]Gregory Brock Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development of Pre-Ministry Undergraduates at Bible Colleges According to the Perry Scheme" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014); Bruce Richard Cannon, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates Attending Confessional Christian Liberal Arts Colleges or Universities" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015); Barry James Gibson, "Emerging Adults and the Elusiveness of Commitment" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015); Christopher Lynn Sanchez, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates Attending Secular Universities" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015).

and the institutions themselves.[4] Thus, many scholars express intense interest in how theological education functions and especially in how it forms students into trustworthy and skilled practitioners. Epistemic development is an integral part of student formation.[5] Kathleen Cahalan describes the goal of targeted development of seminary students in terms of practical reason, "It requires holding multiple perspectives, and through reasoning about practical realities, a person is able to determine how best to proceed in a given situation."[6] Her focus on practical formation is a good reminder entering into this conversation. The goal is not simply to create epistemologically better developed students—although that is certainly a positive—rather, it is to form students who are better prepared to think through complex ministry situations. Marilyn Naiboo reminds seminary students of the gravity of the call. She chides, "Theological students need to become aware that ministry in the form of ministerial leadership is a public and not a private role."[7] Further, there is recognition of the role that institutional culture plays in the formation of students. Therefore, this study will add to this important conversation as well.

This study is relevant to a third conversation—the biblical and theological perspective on the use of the proposed theoretical lens, or any secularly founded lens for that matter.[8] This includes a related sub-question: are the stages or forms of the Perry

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[4]For a well-conceived case for not only theological education but theological schools in particular, see the first chapter of Daniel O. Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 1-26.

[5]See Charles R. Foster et al., *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and the Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 102-3, for three pedagogical challenges to formation of theological students as reported by seminary educators. These challenges can all in a sense be connected to epistemological development in students.

[6]Kathleen A. Cahalan, "Reframing Knowing, Being, and Doing in the Seminary Classroom," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 14, no. 4 (October 1, 2011): 349.

[7]Marilyn Naidoo, "An Empirical Study on Spiritual Formation at Protestant Theological Training Institutions in South Africa," *Religion & Theology* 18, nos. 1-2 (January 2011): 119.

[8]For a contemporary treatment of this question, see David Powlison, "Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies)," in *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), 269-302. The second chapter of this study found below has a substantive

Scheme actually at odds with the ends of Christian education and its commitment to absolute truth as a foundation? Further, are the higher forms of the Perry Scheme in fact desirable for those preparing for vocational, evangelical Christian ministry? These multiple ongoing conversations will be developed further in this chapter in the presentation and current status of the research problem.

## The Perry Scheme

Before a fuller presentation of the research problem, a brief overview of the basics of the intellectual development theory posed in 1970 by education professor William Perry and his group at the Bureau of Study Counsel at Harvard University will prove beneficial. Perry proposed a nine-position (also sometimes called form or stage) developmental scheme.[9] The scheme is used to describe the progression from the most elemental epistemological development position (simple dualism) up through the most advanced—in his view—the development of commitment in a world of relativity. This scheme arose out of his and his staff's long-time interactions with students. They developed a semi-structured interview assessment that was used to give insight into where a student was on this positional progression at the time of the interview. Further, they were able to meet at least yearly with many students affording them the opportunity to track the progression of students over a college career. Listening focus and student-guided style were hallmarks of the interview methodology of Perry and his staff. They would typically begin the follow-up interviews with "Would you like to say what has stood out for you during the year?" This deep concern for students and what was important to them can be quite endearing. One of the better glimpses into the heart of William Perry is the published address *Sharing in the Costs of Growth* in which he talks

interaction with Powlison's epistemological priorities for biblical and theological interaction with secular theory.

[9]Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years*, 64-65.

about walking with students through their losses, even the loss of an idea of a simpler reality.[10] Perry was intensely concerned with helping students develop toward what he saw as a good and fruitful stage of development. In this address, he also gave one of the better, more laymen oriented descriptions of the broad divisions of his nine positions.[11] It begins with the discovery that there are people who are Authority, and they know what they are doing.[12] This is later followed by the discovery that actually they do not know what they are doing so now a person is free to do what he or she wants. However, this discovery of liberty runs into the problem of reality, and reality or facts teach a person that while there is difference of opinion, all opinions are not equal and decisions must be made. Finally the most mature discovery is that a person must make decisions, or better yet commitments, in order to truly live in the world.

That description can be easily comprehended, but for the purposes of this study the positions will need to be more technically defined and as much as they allow given more precise boundaries. Again, putting them into clusters—which seems most common when describing the nine positions—Barbara Hofer and Paul Pintrich arrange and describe them this way:

> *Dualism*. Positions 1 and 2 are characterized by a dualistic, absolutist, right-and-wrong view of the world. Authorities are expected to know the truth and to convey it to the learner.
>
> *Multiplicity*. Position 3 represents a modification of dualism, with the beginning of the recognition of diversity and uncertainty. Authorities who disagree haven't yet found the right answer, but truth is still knowable. By Position 4, dualism is modified again; areas in which there are no absolute answers are outside the realm of authority. An individual at this position is inclined to believe that all views are equally valid and that each person has a right to his or her own opinion.

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[10]William G. Perry, "Sharing in the Costs of Growth," in *Encouraging Development in College Students,* ed. Clyde A. Parker (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), 267-73.

[11]Ibid., 267-68.

[12]Perry capitalized Authority, and Absolute, and Truth when they were being perceived by participants as being in a tautological relationship. See Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years*, 66.

*Relativism.* Position 5 is the watershed of the scheme, as individuals make the shift from a dualistic view of the world to a view of contextual relativism that will continue, with modifications, through the upper stages. A major shift is in the perception of self as an active maker of meaning. At Position 6 individuals perceive knowledge as relative, contingent, and contextual and begin to realize the need to choose and affirm one's own commitments.

*Commitment within relativism.* The final positions, 7 through 9, reflect a focus on responsibility, engagement, and the forging of commitment within relativism. Individuals make and affirm commitments to values, careers, relationships, and personal identity. Developments in the upper positions are described by Perry as more qualitative than structural, and are not marked by formative change. Although proposed as part of the scheme, these positions were not commonly found among college students.[13]

It was assumed that most of the participants in this research among graduate level seminary students will be scored in the upper level positions. However, surprises lay ahead. The remarks of David Schuller at a conference on theological education and moral formation suggest that many seminary students could be in a middle position. He commented to Richard John Neuhaus and the other attendees this way:

Yes, we have to plunge in and test the implications of what a possible effort would mean, set this experimental mode against what we often see our students going through—and that's what Allan Bloom calls commitment to noncommitment. Our students oftentimes never get past it. They can't say, "I realize the relativity of the entire world and of particular cultural commitments and embodiments, but finally I've got to come down somewhere. I must identify with one part of the world or another."[14]

**Presentation of Research Problem**

Epistemology is a buzzword in the seminary context. It comes up in course work on apologetics, systematic theology, and in courses that encompass human development issues such as pastoral counseling. Professors are keen to have students identify, critique, and develop their own personal epistemology, but even with so much interest, there is still a lack of research on the measurement and description of the

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[13]Barbara K. Hofer and Paul R. Pintrich, "The Development of Epistemological Theories: Beliefs about Knowledge and Knowing and Their Relation to Learning," *Review of Educational Research* 67, no. 1 (1997): 91.

[14]Richard John Neuhaus, ed., *Theological Education and Moral Formation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 189.

epistemic development of seminary students. If Timothy Lincoln is correct in his appraisal, then this is part of larger lack. He wrote, "Although there is a large literature about the great ends of theological education, there is a much smaller and rather unsystematic literature about how seminary changes students."[15] These will be covered in more depth in chapter 2, but a quick overview of a couple of related studies will underscore this deficit. As far as epistemic development of seminary students, the most relevant study used a measure called the Reflective Judgment Model.[16]This model is a measure of how participants cognitively handle ill-structured problems. The Reflective Judgment Model has a theoretical debt to the Perry Scheme, but what about a true Perry Scheme study of seminary students? There is not one. In fact, it is difficult to find Perry Scheme work with graduate students. One study used the Perry Scheme to sort graduate students in a counselor education program,[17] but in this case it was used as a means to make discriminations that would contribute to arranging an experiment that would be used to evaluate and commend a grounded theory on the composition of collaborative groups. So, in this instance, at least, the epistemic measurement is a means to an end, not necessarily a focus.

Alongside the acute lack of Perry Scheme study of graduate students and of seminary students as a professional subset of that group, a need for the seminary community to better understand the influence of institutional culture on the formation of students takes its place. A few excellent works on this area of inquiry have been written.

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[15]Timothy D. Lincoln, "How Master of Divinity Education Changes Students: A Research-based Model," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 13, no. 3 (July 1, 2010): 208.

[16]Janet L. Dale, "Reflective Judgment: Seminarians' Epistemology in a World of Relativism," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 33, no. 1 (2005): 56-64. This study is indebted in its theoretical basis to Patricia M. King and Karen S. Kitchener, *Developing Reflective Judgment: Understanding and Promoting Intellectual Growth and Critical Thinking in Adolescents and Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1994).

[17]Christopher W. Lovell and John Nunnery, "Testing the Adult Development Tower of Babel Hypothesis: Homogeneous by Perry Position Collaborative Learning Groups and Graduate Student Satisfaction," *Journal of Adult Development* 11, no. 2 (April 2004): 139-50.

One to mention in particular is the ethnographic study of two seminaries presented in the book *Being There*.[18] This book offers insightful cultural description and analysis of two seminaries. However, it does not directly address the epistemic development of students, nor does it look at a selection of institutions that would have a great overlap of interest in a single group of like-minded students. Both of these concerns are addressed in this study, or at least a beginning is made toward describing them better as a support to further research.

## Current Status of Research Problem

Trentham offered fifteen possible scenarios for further research to complement and extend not only his study, but also in some cases the fields of Perry Scheme studies and even cognitive development more generally.[19] While this study does not answer in every respect one of those proposals, it does answer in some respects some of those proposals. The following are two of Trentham's suggestions that are identified as sharing some common ground with the purpose of this study.

> Using a similar design and method as exemplified in this research, a study may be undertaken to explore the comparative differentiations regarding personal formation and epistemological development among Pre-Ministry students attending confessional Christian liberal arts universities and those attending *non-confessional* Christian liberal arts universities.[20]

> A study may be designed to explore the *impact of seminary education* on epistemological development. This study could engage in a comparative analysis of ministers of similar ages and ministerial experience, grouped according to whether or not they attended seminary.[21]

The current study examines a sample of evangelical seminarians answering in

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[18]Jackson W. Carroll et al., *Being There: Culture and Formation in Two Theological Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[19]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 220-22.

[20]Ibid., 220-21.

[21]Ibid., 221.

part the second suggestion above. Further, the second research question of this study is the basis of a comparison of denominational and inter/multidenominational[22] same-type institutions. This examination is a valuable, but more narrow development of the use of the Perry Scheme to study any possible variance observed between institutions with varied denominational (and in some respects confessional) commitments which is related to the first of Trentham's suggestions above. The participants for the research project have experienced a seminary education, and how that type of graduate study may have impacted progression through Perry Scheme stages will be analyzed. This research project is a larger and perhaps more notable extension as the Perry Scheme is used to describe the epistemological developmental stage of graduate students in general and in seminary students in particular.

Any variances observed may contribute to the understanding of how institutional commitments along the lines of denominational affiliation impact the formation of students, especially in regard to how they understand knowledge and their own epistemic identities. With the landscape of seminaries undergoing tectonic shifts, research that describes potential impacts to student formation is very valuable to seminary decision makers including boards of trustees and senior administration. [23]

In order to better understand the two institutional types being sampled for this research, verbatim selections from institutional websites of potential participating schools are given below. These excerpts from published statements of faith, identity, and mission are helpful in underscoring the fine but very real distinctions between these types of schools. While all the seminaries occupy a narrow band of seminary theological commitments the differences between the two institutional types are noticeable.

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[22]For a definition of inter/multidenominational, see p. 50.

[23]For current descriptions of just some of the challenges and changes, see Justo L. González, *The History of Theological Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), ix-xi.

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville is a good example of

a denominational school. On the institutional web page for information about the

seminary, the denominational affiliation along with its confessional commitments are

front and center:

> The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary stands on the confessional vision articulated by the founding faculty in the Abstract of Principles and on the Baptist Faith and Message . . . Southern Seminary is an agency of the Southern Baptist Convention. In addition to providing substantial financial support to the seminary, the Convention also elects the Board of Trustees of the seminary.[24]

Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, like The Southern Baptist

Theological Seminary, has strong confessional identification. It stands firmly on the

*Westminster Standards* along with a respectful acknowledgment and use of other well-

known historic, Reformed confessions and catechisms.

> Westminster is committed to Scripture and to the systematic exposition of biblical truth known as the Reformed faith. The very name of the institution signals clearly that our systematic theology has been and remains an outworking of the theological documents known as the Westminster Standards. In addition to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, the Seminary treasures the rich and harmonious diversity of creeds and confessions within the historic Reformed tradition. In particular, it recognizes that the system of doctrine contained in Scripture is also confessed in the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort).[25]

The seminary, though, serves numerous denominations while remaining independent in

its governance and identity.

> The Seminary is governed by a self-perpetuating board consisting of at least fifteen but not more than thirty trustees, of whom at least one-half but not more than three-fifths must be ministers of the gospel. Each member of the board is required by the charter to subscribe to a pledge of a character similar to that required of the Faculty, and is required to be a ruling or teaching elder in a church that shares the Seminary's commitments and Presbyterian and Reformed heritage.[26]

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[24]The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed January 18, 2016, http://www.sbts.edu/about/.

[25]Westminster Theological Seminary, accessed January 18, 2016, http://www.wts.edu/about/beliefs/historiccreed.html.

[26]Westminster Theological Seminary, accessed January 18, 2016, http://www.wts.edu/about/history.html.

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary is another example of an inter/multidenominational seminary. The school is clearly evangelical and professes to be so, but it is with a very distilled statement of faith with a much longer mission statement that unpacks the various ways in which its less elaborated theological commitments allow it to be very flexible and open to all those in evangelical circles. This statement from Gordon-Conwell's twenty-two page mission statement, gives an indication of how they seek to stay committed yet open.

> Those who work and study at Gordon-Conwell are united in the common belief that the abiding truth of God's written Word and the centrality of Christ's saving work are foundational to the Seminary's mission. These principles structure the Seminary's life and values, inform its curriculum and activities, and determine the evangelical perspective in which it sees its responsibilities in preparing students for ministry in the modern world.

> Gordon-Conwell's institutional identity is formed as a result of its past history and the understanding of its present mission. Today, it seeks to combine fidelity to the teaching of the inerrant biblical Word with rigorous, responsible inquiry in all matters pertaining to Christian faith. It guards the essentials of the Reformation faith but allows freedom in the formulation of non-essentials. It is firmly evangelical but maintains professional relations with schools of different theological persuasions. It is committed both to academic excellence and practical relevance, both to personal piety and social responsibility, both to historic orthodoxy and its expression in language and actions understandable in the modern world. Gordon-Conwell is interdenominational and yet warmly supportive of the denominations.[27]

The examples above give an indication of a move from greater homogeneity to greater diversity in the mission of the seminaries, admittedly all contained within a narrow band of Christian tradition. An initial examination of two closely related institutional types should give indications for the direction of further expansion in the description and analysis of the role institutional type plays, if any at all, in the epistemological development of seminary students.

The literature review in chapter 2 offers further reflection on the compatibility of the Perry model with a biblical and theological view of humans and their development.

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[27]Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, "The Mission of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, accessed January 18, 2016, http://www.gordonconwell.edu/about/documents/mission.pdf.

This contributes to the ongoing Perry Scheme based research being performed in an evangelical context. For example, this was a key concern of Long in his thesis research evaluating Bible college students according to the Perry Scheme. He evaluated the possible options under these headings: integration, wise appropriation, and inverse consistency.[28] In chapter 2, these three ways of interacting with secular development in general and the Perry model in particular will each be analyzed. A dialogue with both Trentham and Long will be joined highlighting positive analysis along with suggestions for further development. Possible areas for improvement or clarification will also be offered.

## Research Purpose Statement

The intent of this study is to explore the nature of epistemological development in evangelical seminarians across different institutional contexts, using the Perry Scheme as a theoretical lens.

## Research Questions

The research questions along with sub-questions are given below.

1.  What is the nature of epistemological development of evangelical seminarians according to the Perry Scheme?

2.  What is the variance, if any, in the epistemological development of evangelical seminarians among those attending evangelical seminaries with various organizational missions?

    a.  What is the relationship between attendance at a denominational seminary and progression through the positions of the Perry Scheme?

    b.  What is the relationship between attendance at an inter/multidenominational seminary and progression through the positions of the Perry Scheme?

3.  How do evangelical seminarians describe the seminary experience in relationship to

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[28]Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development of Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 53-58.

their own development?

CHAPTER 2

PRECEDENT LITERATURE REVIEW

In addition to the fifty-plus years of research done on what has come to be

called the Perry Scheme, in the last few years there has been a focused application of the

scheme by doctoral students at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.[1] The focus

of the research—initiated by John David Trentham's PhD dissertation—has been the

examination of varying populations of undergraduates using the Perry Scheme.[2] Granted,

the study of undergraduates utilizing the Perry Scheme is nothing new. However, two

unique aspects set these projects apart from other Perry studies. First, the populations of

undergraduates have a strong commonality. The populations share a profession of

Christian faith; even up to the point that they have identified that they will be seeking

vocational ministry training such as is offered at a seminary. Second, the distinguishing

mark of these studies has been the use of Trentham's Inverse Consistency Principle and

his developing taxonomy of epistemological priorities and commitments to critique the

epistemic assumptions of the Perry Scheme and to better interpret the research results for

each of these populations.[3] The classification of interviews according to Trentham's

[1]Gregory Brock Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development of Pre-Ministry Undergraduates at Bible Colleges According to the Perry Scheme" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014); Bruce Richard Cannon, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates Attending Confessional Christian Liberal Arts Colleges or Universities" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015); Barry James Gibson, "Emerging Adults and the Elusiveness of Commitment" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015); Christopher Lynn Sanchez, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates Attending Secular Universities" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015).

[2]John David Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates: A Cross Institutional Application of the Perry Scheme" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012).

[3]Ibid., 121-29 and .166-94.

epistemological priorities and competencies made a notable significant positive contribution to this study. First, it provided Trentham as another independent rater of the interviews in addition to William Moore of the Center for the Study of Intellectual Development and me. Second, it offered explanatory classifications for the intellectual and ethical growth observed that is different than what is best described and measured by the Perry Scheme.

The literature review proceeds in four movements. The initial movement revisits the main aspects of the Perry Scheme adding to what was offered in the first chapter. The second movement foregrounds those salient features of the Perry Scheme that describe its assumptions of human development in general and cognitive development in particular. As each feature is discussed a positive description of the biblical perspective on that feature is offered along with an argument for its priority over that of the Perry Scheme. The third movement discusses the context for the population for this Perry study. While the preceding studies in this series have been undergraduates, the population for this study was graduate students. Further, they were Master of Divinity students at evangelical theological seminaries of differing institutional types. This population builds upon and extends the accumulated knowledge on the intellectual and ethical development of students as described by the Perry Scheme while also confronting the developmental model with a type of student for whom development should be forestalled according to the epistemic assumptions of the model. The fourth movement will offer the use of the Inverse Consistency Principle as a best way forward and how this will proceed will be discussed. Lastly, for the sake of clarity and precision, important terms are defined for the purposes of this study and a research hypothesis is offered.

## The Perry Scheme

The basics of the William Perry's scheme and its development have been offered in the introductory chapter. Here only a few of the most pertinent details are

repeated. What receives more attention in this section are the philosophical commitments of the scheme and how they have shaped its assumptions about intellectual maturity. Also, while a brief overview of the positions of the Perry Scheme was offered in the first chapter, here a more detailed and analytic summary of the positions is advanced.[4]

**Key Influences on the Perry Scheme**

The Perry Scheme, like all developmental theory, arises from even more foundational theory, specifically philosophy regarding the nature of purpose, development, and knowledge. Perry was well versed in the liberal arts, including philosophy, psychology, and literature. Three of the most significant influences on his work (according to Perry) were John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Michael Polanyi.[5] From John Dewey, the goals of intellectual and ethical development were framed in the values of contextual pragmatism. What this means is that the desired outcome for men and women is that they come to grips with the uncertainty of the human condition and in that condition they choose to take a stand that reflects their commitments that will help them live the best life as they see fit. In other words, expressing human autonomy in intellect and self-determination is the desired goal.

As for Piaget, it is very common for his work to provide the basis for any theory of human development. However, Perry was well aware that his scheme was notable both for its similarities and its departures from Piaget's framework. The scheme is a stage-based theory, even though he used the title position, so it is similar in that

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[4]The overall structure and even many subject headings for this chapter were modeled on chapter 2 of Gregory Brock Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development of Pre-Ministry Undergraduates at Bible Colleges According to the Perry Scheme" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014). Using these "stubs" has allowed for quickly and efficiently discovering and noting the major features of the literature landscape. However, as this study develops and takes on its own individual character, this chapter in its headings and structure will begin to reflect the unique contributions of the author and the study.

[5]William G. Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme*, Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 226-30.

manner.[6] One way it differs in that Perry seeks to describe those developments that proceed upon and past formal operations as Piaget outlined them.[7] Because of this extension and other characteristics, Estep and Trentham classify Perry as a neo-Piagetian. Along with the utilizing stages beyond formal operations, neo-Piagetians "do not limit human development to a rigid structuralism, but utilize insights from alternative theories."[8] Perry's neo-Piagetian extensions and variations on the work of Piaget have contributed significantly to the area of adult cognitive research.[9]

Finally, one of the most intriguing precedents for Perry is the work of Michael Polanyi. What Polanyi offers for Perry is a way forward for the person in the midst of uncertainty through the avenue of commitment. Below is a key passage from Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* that demonstrates the philosophical foundation for commitments of faith that Perry will into his theoretical description of the upper levels of epistemological development.

> Commitment offers to those who accept it legitimate grounds for the affirmation of personal convictions with universal intent. Standing on these grounds, we claim that our participation is personal, not subjective, except in so far as it is compulsive. While it then lies beyond our responsibility, it is yet transformed by our sense of responsibility into part of our calling.[10]

Also, as an item of interest it is worth noting how Polanyi—as we will see with Perry—uses the Christian narrative to describe the human process of coming to grips with the uncertainty of knowledge in the world and the quest to make sense. Polanyi

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[6]Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini, *How College Affects Students: A Third Decade of Research*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 34.

[7]Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 229.

[8]John David Trentham and James Riley Estep, Jr., "Early Adult Formation and Discipleship at the Intersection of Neurological and Phenomenological Research," *Journal for Discipleship and Family Ministry* 5, no.2 (2016): 8-9.

[9]See Nancy J. Evans et al., *Student Development in College: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 144.

[10]Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 324.

writes,

> The stage on which we thus resume our full intellectual powers is borrowed from the Christian scheme of Fall and Redemption. Fallen Man is equated to the historically given and subjective condition of our mind, from which we may be saved by the grace of the spirit.[11]

On this note of hopeful common ground from which to build, this study now turns to making a fuller description of the Perry Scheme and what is involved in its charting of man's quest for epistemic commitment.

**The Positions of the Perry Scheme**

A very compact overview of the positions was given above. Here the description of each position is treated and an analytical element for each is offered. Also, Perry noted that students sometimes chose alternatives to continued development at times in the progression of development described by the scheme. These alternatives are considered briefly and any aspects of the alternatives that are relevant to this study are noted.

The positions—which number nine in all—are typically arranged into four groups with a higher level description given for each. The four groups are Dualism, Multiplicity, Relativism, and Commitment.[12]

**Position 1.** The initial position is representative of a *Basic Dualism* understanding of knowledge and its source. Perry calls this the "Garden of Eden"[13] position to stress the naiveté of the knower in this position. This is a position in which the

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[11]Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 324.

[12]William G. Perry, "Cognitive and Ethical Growth: The Making of Meaning," in *The Modern American College*, ed. Arthur W. Chickering and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981), 79-80.

[13]Ibid., 80-81. For this this analogy in its seminal form, see William G. Perry, *Patterns of Development in Thought and Values of Students in a Liberal Arts College: A Validation of a Scheme. Final Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, Bureau of Research, Final Report, Project No. 5-0825, Contract No. SAE-8973, 1968), 18.

knower relies completely on Authorities to provide the Absolutes. While this is very rare to non-existent in its pure form in the subjects of Perry's interviews, he points to recollections and reflections of interviewees to substantiate its existence, even at the beginning of the college experience for some.[14]

**Position 2.** In this position the student is moving from the most basic of dualistic thinking into the area of multiplicity. For this reason Perry called this position *Multiplicity Prelegitimate*. The new stance in this position is a more discriminating view of Authorities. True Authorities are still the source of the Absolutes, but one must be wary of pretenders.[15] Pretenders to authority will be exposed because they cannot handle complexity. As students try to explain their growing awareness of uncertainty, there is another option they propose. It is that Authorities are supplying uncertainty so that "we can learn to find the Answer for ourselves."[16]

**Position 3.** This position of *Multiplicity Legitimate but Subordinate* is well on its way to recognition that "[u]ncertainty is now unavoidable." The student has realized through experience and exposure that "uncertainty and complexity are no longer . . . mere exercises or impediments devised by Authority but . . . realities in their own right, plumb in the middle of Authority's world."[17] This is a trying position because while the developing knower is confronted with growing uncertainty he or she has problems distinguishing "between legitimate abstract thought and its counterfeit."[18] This can be overwhelming and may lead to forestalling further development for a period of time.

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[14] Perry, "Cognitive and Ethical Growth," 81.

[15] Ibid., 81-82.

[16] Ibid., 82.

[17] Ibid., 99.

[18] Ibid., 83.

**Position 4.** This position has two manifestations, the first 4a is *Multiplicity Coordinate (or Correlate)* and the second 4b is *Relativism Subordinate*. What determines the path that a student follows is the reaction to the realization that uncertainty is rampant in the domain of Authority, but at the same time the student is compelled (usually for a grade) to produce a response. Some become oppositional and almost scheming in response and they move into a modified sort of dualism that is akin to a split personality. The *Multiplicity Coordinate* student creates "an epistemological realm equal to and over against the world of Authority in which certain Right Answers are known."[19] In this new fiefdom of the student's creation the sovereignty of personal opinion holds sway. To call these opinions sovereign is no overstatement. Perry described the nature of opinion in this position with these terms, "opinion is related to nothing whatever—evidence, reason experience, expert judgment, context, principle, or purpose—except to the person who holds it."[20] If this sounds like a somewhat dangerous spot for the student, it is. Perry does not hesitate to use strong warning language about this step on the student's journey. He concludes at one point with this, "This is perhaps the most critical moment in the whole adventure for both student and teacher."[21]

The second pathway is traveled by students (and others) who are, in Perry's terms, Adherent. They are more trusting of Authority—even in the midst of the realization of pervasive uncertainty. These *Relativism Subordinate* students are "[t]rusting in Authority to have valid grounds for grading even in areas of uncertainty, they set themselves to learn those grounds."[22] The student on this path has the easier road of transition to the next—and major—epistemological development. Because they are not

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[19]Perry, "Cognitive and Ethical Growth," 84.

[20]Ibid., 85.

[21]Ibid., 81-82.

[22]Ibid., 86.

shielded by the retreat to a castle of personal opinion, they truly grapple with the complexity they are discovering even in the domain of Authority. As they seek to make sense of conflicting models of thought by teachers and others they begin to weigh these models and make the beginnings of qualitative discriminations. Perry excitedly notes that "[t]his comparison of interpretations and thought systems with one another introduces *meta-thinking*, the capacity to examine thought including one's own."[23] The foundational cognitive skill required to enter into deeper relativistic thinking is now in place in embryonic form.

Position 5. As students become more adept at meta-thinking (or meta-cognition), the world of *Relativism* becomes their habitat. It is worthwhile to mention here what Perry does *not* mean by relativism since the way we commonly understand it is much closer, if not identical, to what he terms multiplicity. Multiplicity is where every opinion is personal and because it is personal it is valid for that person, and no one has the epistemic authority to say otherwise. For Perry, relativism has "analysis, rules of evidence, disciplines of inference, and concern for the integrity of interpretations and systems of thought."[24] Contextual is the key word for his version of relativism.

Position 6. A new key-word and concept begins to arise in the first position in the last cluster of developmental rest stops along the way.[25] This is commitment. In this first position it is *Commitment Foreseen* as students adapt to their new relativistic perceptions of the world around them, and in them for that matter. At this point Perry begins to use quasi-religious language to describe the path ahead for these higher level

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[23]Perry, "Cognitive and Ethical Growth," 88.

[24]Ibid., 85.

[25]Perry makes insightful comments concerning the transitional nature of development. He emphasizes that it is likely the transitions that are the more intriguing. But, since we need to nail down a position in time it is these positions (or stages in other theories) that we generally remark upon. See ibid., 78.

students. Speaking of how the students navigate and advance, he uses a student example "that goes on to imagine that the first steps may require an almost arbitrary faith, or even a willing suspension of disbelief."[26] There is a palpable sense of increased existential pressure in the students he and his colleagues have rated as being in this position.

**Positions 7-9.** In his later work, Perry grouped these three very closely related positions all together under the title *Evolving Commitments*. However, it will be good to reference his earlier book in which the three positions are distinguished from each other. This could be especially important since the population of this study is graduate students who are have a higher likelihood to be rated at the higher positions than were the college students that generally composed Perry's participants.

Position 7 is *Initial Commitment* and represents the decision by student (or knower) to make a decision. To move on, he or she must commit to making commitments and becoming a person defined by those very choices. Perry describes a person at this position in this way, "Internally he typically experiences a relief in settled purpose, and at the same time he feels strongly *defined by* the external forms typifying the role he has chosen."[27] For many this decision to be committed as a person will result in a vocational direction or a committed relationship or some other tangible expression of the internal decision to be a committed person.

Position 8 has a title almost as long as the description that Perry offers in *Intellectual and Ethical Growth*! This penultimate position is *Orientation in Implications of Commitment* and simply marks the transition from making commitments to actually living them out in a certain way; Perry calls these "stylistic issues."[28]

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[26]Perry, "Cognitive and Ethical Growth," 93.

[27]Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 171.

[28]Ibid.

The final position proposed by Perry and his colleagues brings together a balance of both understanding the nature or content of the commitments made along with a determined way to live them out. *Developing Commitments*, though, is still a place of action and movement as the student continues to reflect and adapt as he wrestles with the implications of his world. As Perry says, "He is to be forever on the move."[29] In fact, this position along with the initial position are more theoretical than observed. These two positions then boundary the forms of thought that the student moves between.

**Alternatives to growth.** Sometimes when discussing a developmental pattern of stages we can be caught thinking that it is a smooth and invariably progressive process, but Perry and his colleagues are thorough in pointing out the handful of ways that students for different reasons halted—and sometimes even reversed—the progression of the scheme, either for a short while or for indeterminate length of time into the future. The first of these alternatives is *temporizing*. This pause in growth over a time span of a full academic year (one wonders how we should measure this now that students are much less traditional in attendance) is a time for students to consolidate and branch out in the current position of development. During this time they can be waiting for "some event that might turn up"[30] that will help them resume their progression, or for those more personally responsible waiting for an increase in his or her own "agency to rise within"[31] and give that push toward further development. Even in waiting for personal agency there is bit of shrug and capitulation to some type of outside force (Perry references fate). This alternative may best be captured by the cliché saying "stuck in a holding pattern."

The second alternative is a bit more drastic. *Retreat* is exactly what it sounds

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[29]Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 171.

[30]Perry, "Cognitive and Ethical Growth," 90.

[31]Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 199.

like. The student is confronted with the uncertainty of knowledge and authorities and life in general, and so gives away the ground he captured and moves back into a previous position. This more often happens in the lower level positions and as Perry notes can take the form of moving back into a dualism position but with "an added moralistic righteousness and righteous hatred of Otherness."[32] This alternative well captures the alienation that Perry and his interviewers encountered from time to time. However, for the truest example of alienation, Perry gives the third alternative. *Escape* can be a temporary period of dissociation in which the student resignedly just gives it all up to outside forces (again Perry uses fate as the outside force). This route out of growth is marked by a depression and abandonment. The other route of escape is encapsulation where the student uses activity as a shield against "the implications of deeper values."[33] This seems the more cynical of the options. Here the student picks up the trappings of more critical thought, but just so she can get by and not be troubled by having to really struggle with commitment.

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**The Assumptions of the Perry Scheme
in Biblical Perspective**

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Many of the Perry Scheme assumptions about human development and its *telos* were given in brief above. In this section those assumptions are expanded into greater detail. Then for each assumption of the Perry Scheme the biblical viewpoint on that assumption is provided. Through this section, the warning of Richard Butman and David Moore are heeded, that the terms that Perry uses like "relativism" will not be "easily misunderstood."[34] However, this is a more thorough and less approving critique than

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[32]Perry, "Cognitive and Ethical Growth," 91.

[33]Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 212-13.

[34]Richard E. Butman and David R. Moore, "The Power of Perry and Belenky," in *Nurture That Is Christian: Developmental Perspectives on Christian Education*, ed. James C. Wilhoit and John M. Dettoni (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 108.

Butman and Moore provided.

**Epistemological Development**

What does it mean to develop in epistemological skill and understanding? Well, it depends upon who you ask. There are some general comments that can be made about this type of cognitive development. However, very quickly any description will begin to lay bare its philosophical—and even meta-physical—base beliefs.

**Perry and development**. One of the many things to appreciate about Perry is his forthcoming nature. He readily recognizes that any theory of development or growth carries with it certain values held by the theorist. He states this with clarity in a section on the concept of development.

> The word 'growth' will be used in the usual way to refer to progress in the development. However, since the word 'growth,' when applied as a biological metaphor in psychological and social contexts, necessarily picks up assumptions about values, it is well to acknowledge them at the outset.[35]

True to what he had proposed, Perry always seemed to be self-aware of how his work was a transmission of his values and that of like-minded academics. He readily admitted these assumptions.

> The values built into our scheme are those we assume to be commonly held in significant areas of our culture, finding their most concentrated expression in such institutions as colleges of liberal arts, mental health movements, and the like. We happen to subscribe to them ourselves. We would argue, for example, that the final structures of our scheme express an optimally congruent and responsible address to the present state of man's predicament.[36]

That is a very transparent admission. And, it allows us as the critics of the scheme to know without guessing just what Perry and his colleagues saw as the type of world we live in and in that conceived world the ultimate goal of development for man. The world is "uncertain and relativistic," so much so that students in the early positions of the higher

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[35]Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 48-49.

[36]Ibid., 50.

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positions are described as being "at sea." [37] Perry does, though, long for them to make it into port. In his view, the safe port, the right port, in the sea of uncertainty and relativism is best expressed by Michael Polanyi's "ultimate welding of epistemological and moral issues in commitment" as it is congruent with the values of the "contextualistic-pragmatic and existential traditions."[38] In summary, Perry has a self-conscious, value-laden view of development. This development of movement through positions is best expressed as a journey to existential and pragmatic *personal* commitment in a world of nearly endless objects of commitment. The direction of commitment is of little importance as long as it is done in a spirit of personal, reflective ethics and caring. As much as Perry tried to distance his version of relativism from the common understanding of the term, there is still significant overlap in the manner that his highest expressions understand absolutes. One of his transcribed example interviews for the highest positions expresses this on values, "if there is not clear right and wrong, then what I think you *have* to do is reject the idea of right and wrong, and find out what *you* want."[39] Perry's vision of the developmental good is the fullest expression of human autonomy where even what is right or wrong is established by the individual.

**The Bible and development.** The Bible also presents an expectation that humans will grow. We have come to describe the way humans are designed to grow as sanctification. Sanctification is the synergistic work of the believer and the Holy Spirit as the believer matures and grows into the image of Christ who is the image of God. This is a redemptive process, though, and should not be made the equivalent of humanistic developmental theory. For instance, Joel Brondos in comparing Kohlberg's moral

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[37]Perry, "Cognitive and Ethical Growth," 94.

[38]Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 226.

[39]Ibid., 192.

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development theory and the doctrine of sanctification makes this observation of the difference between the two.

> Sanctification has been regarded among us as ever ongoing but always imperfect before eternal life. Strictly speaking, by way of contrast, a purely developmental approach which sees sanctification in terms of "faith development" suggests consistent upward movement from stage to stage: it would be highly irregular for any individual to regress from a higher stage to a lower. The doctrine of sanctification, however, readily admits the possibility of backsliding, of turning away from the good even when it is known to be superior. Sanctification may be considered in terms of progression and growth, but it could not readily be identified as developmental in the Kohlbergian sense.[40]

Now, it should be noted that Perry made the astute determination to include in his scheme the ways that some students escaped or avoided growth for a period of time. However, the discontinuities between the biblical doctrine of sanctification and developmental theory need to be emphasized since there are certainly similarities as well, but they should not be seen as equivalent.

A biblical doctrine of sanctification may include the following main points. Sanctification is mainly not the leaving of immaturity for maturity; rather it is the leaving of sin for holiness. Second Corinthians 7:1 pleads, "Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God." Also, sanctification is primarily a spiritual battle in which the Spirit and the flesh war against each other (Gal 5:17, 1 Pet 3:11) and while we are in the body it will always be a contested battle (Rom 7:23), but with a sure outcome (Phil 3:20-21). Finally, the goal is not to become fully sufficient in ourselves, rather it is to become fully obedient to God such as is seen at the end of 2 Corinthians 7:1, "bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God."

So, there are a number of important distinctions to be made. However, there are also similarities. A key similarity is that what Perry and other theorists call

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[40]Joel A. Brondos, "Sanctification and Moral Development," *Concordia Journal* 17, no. 4 (October 1991): 419-39.

intellectual growth (or increased reflective thinking, or metacognition, or whatever term is used to identify matured thinking) will bear a great deal of resemblance in its outworking to the biblical concept of wisdom, which is one of the fruits of sanctification. As Eric Johnson wrote, "Wisdom also has a long history as a label for the Christian developmental goal of mature human thought."[41] So, the Christian worldview already possesses a robust and well defined category of growth by which to understand the type of development described by Perry.

Before moving on to the next subsection, it is worthwhile to summarize by way of three points made by Henze. These are manners in which the Perry Scheme in particular and human development theory in general may fall short of a biblical understanding of human development.

> First, these assumptions might arguably suggest a predetermination and an inability to change that Christian views on agency, conversion, and sanctification might dispute. Second, these latter assumptions imply a naturalistic world where progress and growth are left to chance unless altered solely by man's own efforts. Third, they imply a world devoid of a spiritual dimension lacking the supernatural power and grace of God and the Holy Spirit.[42]

**Personal Knowledge**

One way in which Perry and a biblical understanding of knowledge overlap is by an assumption of its personal nature. For both, knowledge is something that makes a difference in the person, it is not this completely objective concept. Further, both Perry and a Christian worldview understand the importance of commitment to see growth in a person. However, the exact conception of the personal nature of knowledge and also the object of commitment will differ between the two.

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[41]Eric L. Johnson, "The Call of Wisdom: Adult Development within the Christian Community, Part II," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 24, no. 2 (July 1996): 94.

[42]Mark E. Henze, "Re-Examining and Refining Perry: Epistemological Development from a Christian Perspective," *Christian Education Journal* 3, no. 2 (2006): 271.

**Perry and personal knowledge.** As mentioned above, Perry and his colleagues drew from the work of Michael Polanyi for the basis of their description of the way students navigated and advanced in the midst of complexity and uncertainty in college. This happened as described by Perry in terms of Polanyi's analysis in the "ultimate welding of epistemological and moral issues in the act of Commitment."[43] The upper echelon of Perry Scheme is essentially the lead up to and execution of the realization of personal knowledge. It should be pointed out that this growing into personal knowledge and commitment it not simply choosing a path in life, nor is it a bare intellectual exercise. Perry does include those things that express commitment in a concretized way, such as marriage or career. However, he also goes beyond these to make a holistic description of commitment in personal knowledge.

> One includes not only these external objects but also man's acts of choice, and the personal investment he makes in them, the word refers to an affirmatory experience through which the man continuously defines his identity and his involvements in the world (cf. Polanyi, 1958).[44]

As can be seen from the quote above, this is not a simple exercise of reason, rather it is holistic in that involves the whole of a person both choosing knowledge and then acting upon it. This is a holistic perspective on man; however, it is also a view that promotes the autonomy of man. The basis of knowledge is his person.

**The Bible and personal knowledge.** Scripture—as the drama of redemption unfolds—presents quite a different direction for personal knowledge. Thinking about the immediately preceding section, the coming of Jesus coming into the world answers a resounding "No" to the supremacy of autonomous human reason. Mary Healy commenting on the epistemology implicit in the writings of the Apostle Paul wrote the following.

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[43]Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 226.

[44]Ibid., 150.

> Paul, echoing Jesus' own teaching (cf. Mt 11:25f), insists that according to God's deliberate intention, 'the world did not know God through wisdom' (1:21). A knowledge founded on autonomous reason evades the risk of self-engagement which is the *sine qua non* of personal knowledge.[45]

Ian Scott demonstrates that the ultimate knowledge in Scripture is the knowledge of a person, in fact the deity. In Paul's writing Scott notes "the remarkable way in which Christ, a human being, becomes involved as a mediator of that knowledge—even as an object of this devotion in his own right."[46] So, there is the necessity of a personal commitment to grow according to a biblical design for development, but it is not a commitment of a person *per se*, rather it is the commitment to a person, and to grow in knowing that person.

There are many ways in which we are to grow up into Christ. For instance, one of the most important attributes of growth for the Christian is love. Jesus shortly before his death and resurrection gives this command to his followers, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another" (John 13:34). Another aspect of growth is wisdom and this is the most relevant to the growth we are talking about in the Perry Scheme. Wisdom is learning to see the world as it really is, and that is as a good creation by the Father, but also one that is fallen so that there is uncertainty, and conflicting ideas, and even enmity. Wisdom is seeing all these things and being able to make reasonable, justifiable decisions and commitments. As is discussed in more depth below in another section, we are called to a personal relationship with wisdom in the person of Jesus who both models wisdom and is wisdom in his person.

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[45]Mary Healy, "Knowledge of the Mystery: A Study of Pauline Epistemology," in *The Bible and Epistemology: Biblical Soundings on the Knowledge of God*, ed. Mary Healy and Robin Parry (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2007), 144.

[46]Ian W. Scott, *Implicit Epistemology in the Letters of Paul: Story, Experience and the Spirit* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 153.

**The Nature of Truth**

The most basic and most naïve positions of the Perry Scheme are structures of thought that rely on Absolutes and Authorities. This is simple dualism in respect to truth. While we will not argue for such a simple dualism, it must be pointed out that while the Perry Scheme and Christian formation both seek a more nuanced and developed understanding of truth, the existence of any absolute truth is a very clear difference between the two views of desirable human development.

**Perry and absolute truth.** Given Perry's expressed debt to John Dewey the Pragmatist as a main philosophical influence, it will not be a surprise to see significant similarity in their views of the nature of truth. Peter Collins, in describing Dewey's view of truth in comparison to that held by the Dutch Catechism, writes, "Truth is totally relative to the circumstances; it is discovered only through the problem-solving process, which means, more properly, that it is continuously created anew."[47] As was mentioned above, it is interesting as Polanyi and Perry both pick up elements of the biblical metanarrative to use as analogies for their respective theses. Perry does this in a dramatic way as he describes his view on the loss of the naïve innocence about knowledge that is typified by the lowest positon in his scheme. He writes about a *favorable* fall.

> It was, after all, the serpent who pointed out that the Absolute (the truth about good and evil) was distinct from the Deity and might therefore be known independently— without His mediation. The Fall consisted of man's taking upon himself, at the serpent's suggestion, the knowledge of values and therefore the potential of judgment.[48]

For Perry, there is not an absolute truth to be used as a standard, rather the intellectually and ethically mature will construct a meaningful truth or truths by which to guide and focus the commitments of the individual.

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[47]Peter M. Collins, "Religion and the curriculum: John Dewey and the Dutch Catechism," *Religious Education* 85, no. 1 (1990): 121.

[48]Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 67.

It should be noted, though, that for Perry demolishing the idea of absolute truth is not necessarily a priority. For him in his context it is almost a given. He is interested in describing how students grapple with the loss of dependence on Absolutes and the Authorities that possess the Absolute. For this reason, he gives a few paragraphs to describing the options of religious students as they confront the meaning of relativism. After noting a couple of common observations of how religious students navigated the waters of the upper levels of the scheme, he writes this short paragraph that will be very instructional for how Perry viewed Absolutes.

> The phenomenon points up once again the power of the revolution in which the "special case" of Relativism became the broader context subsuming the previous Absolute world as itself a "special case." The capacity to make this kind of reversal may well be man's most potent tool for transcendence.[49]

Perry seems to have complete confidence in the ability of Relativism to overtake Absolutes, given the opportunity. So, for this reason he does not make his conceptualization of the scheme an attack on absolute truth, rather, it reads more like a post-mortem.

**The Bible and absolute truth.** The Bible is not a philosophy manifesto, nor is it an epistemology textbook. It does not lay out an argument for absolute truth. Rather, it not only assumes absolute truth, it *offers* absolute truth. This offering is not only in its propositions and revelations, but most significantly in the person of Jesus Christ. This can put us at odds with the "modern mind" that David Wells offers is full of "self-constructed truth" similar to that which Perry offers as the highest level of intellectual development.[50] Wells states the difference starkly in a comparison between the modern mind and the Christian mind in his book *No Place for Truth*.

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[49]Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 146.

[50]David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth, or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 279.

> The bottom line for our modernized world is that there is no truth; the bottom line for Christian consciousness is precisely the opposite. The Christian predisposition to believe in the kind of truth that is objective and public and that reflects ultimate reality cuts across the grain of what modernity considers plausible.[51]

The Christian does not believe these things unjustifiably. It is on the basis of the self-attestation of Scripture that not only reveals that God is truth (Titus 1:2, Heb 6:18), but also that his words are truth just as Jesus said in John 17:17. The truth of these statements is then confirmed to the believer through the work of the Holy Spirit (see Westminster Confession of Faith I.5). I t is not just the truthful character of God and the veracity of his words that are revealed in Scripture, though these are of great importance. It is also the person of Jesus Christ who is himself the Word of God in the flesh. Alister McGrath boasts of this great circumstance for the Christian.

> Jesus does not merely show us the truth, or tell us the truth; *he is the truth* – and any concept of 'truth' which is unable to comprehend the fact that truth is personal is to be treated with intense suspicion by evangelicals. 'Truth', in the New Testament sense of the term, is not abstract or purely objective; it is personal, and involves the transformation of the entire existence of those who apprehend it and are themselves apprehended by it.[52]

The Christian proposes that this truth is accessible through a personal relationship, namely with Jesus Christ. This stand, though, does not preclude the Christian's ability to progress through the forms of the Perry Scheme, since it is not the abandonment of the existence absolute truth that is necessary, rather it is the recognition of the need to make a faith commitment in the midst of competing and contextual claims of knowledge.[53]

**The Certainty of Knowledge**

Closely related to the existence of an absolute truth, is the certainty of knowledge. Both Perry and the biblical view are honest about the challenges to finding certainty, in this they are similar. However, Perry puts forward a pessimistic view that

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[51]Wells, *No Place for Truth,* 280.

[52]Alister E. McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 178.

[53]Trentham and Estep, "Early Adult Formation and Discipleship," 11-13.

doubts any possibility of certainty, while the Bible teaches that there is the possibility through the work of God that people may have certainty of specific knowledge.

**Perry and the necessity of uncertainty.** The cluster of positions under relativism is considered the most transformational in the maturing of the student.[54] This is because it leads to acknowledgement or discovery that knowledge is contextualized and relative to the knower. This stage is noted as being the most transformational since it abandons the idea of certainty of knowledge which had been holding back the student from moving into constructing his or her own knowledge. Now, the student can move into the territory of "simultaneous discovery of disciplined meta-thought and irreducible uncertainty."[55] Perry understands that if an individual is going to be free to create knowledge, then the thought of a certainty of knowledge "out there" must be abandoned. The focus of the knowledge enterprise must now be the interior and thinking about thoughts.

**The Bible and certainty.** This examination is very similar to the section that came just before. In that section, it was offered that absolute truth does exist, and that truth is available both in the Bible which is the word of God and in a relationship with Jesus, the living Word of God, Does it follow that we are justified in saying that we can have certainty about this? Alvin Plantinga, who is one of the foremost thinkers associated with Reformed Epistemology, building on Calvin, claims that it is justified.

> The disposition to form these beliefs, then, is really a capacity for grasping certain truths about God. This capacity is part of our native intellectual endowment. It has been distorted and partially suppressed by sin, but it is present nevertheless; it is among the epistemic powers and capacities with which God has created us. Of course, in creating us he has also given us other capacities for grasping truth: perception, memory, and the capacity to apprehend certain truths as self-evident.[56]

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[54]Pascarella and Terenzini, *How College Affects Students*, 35.

[55]Perry, "Cognitive and Ethical Growth," 88.

[56]Alvin C. Plantinga, "On Reformed Epistemology," *Reformed Journal* 32, no. 1 (January

Now, these capacities are limited by our fallenness and finiteness. But, we can know *true* truth. We are, in fact, promised this in the Bible. Jesus in mercy promises to the unbelieving Jews that "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). However, we must always keep both our fallenness (the noetic effects of sin) and our finitude in front of us. This posture will engender epistemic humility in us and will restrain us from claiming certainty when it really cannot be had or at least had by us at the time. That said, though, at the same time we do need to have the confidence to claim as certain truth those things that have been revealed to us by God in very clear ways. God created the heaven and the earth and all that is in them (Gen 1:1-31; Exod 20:11; Ps 33:6; Col 1:16). Humankind sinned in Adam and is under a curse (Gen 2:9, 3:6-13, 16-19; Rom 5:12, 15-19), yet God promised and brought about a hope of salvation in his Son Jesus (Gen 3:16; Rom 5). Jesus died on a cross and was resurrected three days later and remains in heaven from which he will come again to judge and redeem (Mark 15:21 – 16:8; 1 Pet 3:22; Matt 13:40-42). These clear truths of the Scripture must be claimed as certain by the Christian, but much else can be admitted as less than certain.

**The Source of Knowledge**

What must be mentioned is that Perry is consistent in his foundational understanding of the nature of knowledge and the justification of knowledge. Therefore it will be no surprise to see how Perry's concept of the source of knowledge is intricately bound to his thoughts on certainty.

**Perry and the making of meaning.** Gregory Long in his literature review makes two observations that merit repeating in this later review. First he notes that William Perry never himself uses the term "constructivism" or more definitively

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1982):17.

"psychological constructivism," nevertheless Perry's theory bears all the marks of what has come to be called constructivism.[57] Second he also draws attention to the full title of Perry's 1981 article "Cognitive and Ethical Growth: *The Making of Meaning*" [emphasis his], which underscores the view point of Perry on the source of knowledge.[58]

In his basis for the scheme, Perry devotes a section to the making of meaning. Perry describes the way people make meaning by using a concept of forms, one of which people have internally and another group that are available outside of the person. When a person has a new experience he or she either assimilates the new experience and makes meaning by use of the already present and expected forms, or the person must make accommodations which leads to new or transformed forms. The second of these instances is very valuable as it brings to the surface, at times, the structures of meaning that preceded the accommodation as well as the transformation and the new resulting structures.[59] Just looking at the terminology used, the constructivist label seems a good fit. To summarize Perry, people make knowledge using forms to create structures of meaning. As these structures are challenged, people have the choice to either make the new experience fit the old structure or to perform new construction to accommodate (or to avoid in one way or another) the new experience.

**General and special revelation.** The scriptural view of the source of knowledge is that God is the source and he makes himself known through revelation, both general and special. Andrew Hoffecker makes a claim for God's exclusive relationship to knowledge in an introduction to the subject of knowledge in a volume on Christian worldview.

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[57]Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development," 34n83.

[58]Ibid., 35n89.

[59]Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 46.

If God is sovereign over all matters, then His revelation is the basic source of knowledge. God's majestic rule is not limited to His power manifested in creation, or His providential control of history, or His redeeming activity in Exodus or at the cross. The Bible presents God as the author and source of truth. Without God, the very notion of knowledge would not exist, for knowledge as a sum of ideas and individual acts of knowing depends on God as the revealer of truth.[60]

It is these two books, nature and the Bible, that are the access points for us as humans to gain knowledge. Men and women can gain knowledge while yet being unredeemed. General revelation, accessible through God's creational design, testifies to his being, character, and moral law.[61] In fact, there are many things like the paths of stars, the genomic sequence of a dog, and the cognitive development of an adult human for which unbelievers may gain actual knowledge, they need not construct it themselves. It will be true knowledge because it accords with who God is and how he designed the world. Louis Berkhof lists three things, though, that are not available through general revelation and can only be gained through special revelation. These are (1) the only way of salvation, (2) absolutely reliable knowledge of God, and (3) an adequate basis for religion.[62] Therefore, the knowledge of the unbeliever will always be limited. It will be knowledge without its proper end which is a relationship with God in which he is enjoyed and worshipped by his creature.

**What Is the Goal of Development?**

The preceding section is a proper segue into this. God provides the knowledge for man to reach his proper end. In the limited view of knowledge of Perry and others, the end or goal is then commensurably limited and in error. While the Bible provides the knowledge necessary for the proper and right end of development, that is redemption in Christ.

[60]Andrew Hoffecker, introduction to *Building a Christian World View,* ed. Andrew Hoffecker and Gary Scott Smith (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co, 1986), 186.

[61]Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 122-123.

[62]Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 132-133.

**Perry and anthropotelic growth.** Terry Cooper in writing about how to guide students through the disorientating experience of relativism in religious education, makes clear that arriving in the upper positions of the Perry Scheme is the desirable outcome. He writes, "The assumption, of course, is that post-pluralistic thinking is developmentally more adequate, experientially more comprehensive, and cognitively more flexible than pre-pluralistic thinking."[63] This assumption by Cooper is shared by Perry and speaks to the goal for development as it is understood by him and a great many others.

Perry did make a very similar statement in regards to the upper levels of the scheme. He wrote, "We would argue, for example, that the final structures of our scheme express an optimally congruent and responsible address to the present state of man's predicament."[64] This quote, of course, begs the question of the nature of man's predicament as viewed by Perry. Again, he is very clear and open about his influences and on this question one of the most influential is the absurdist Albert Camus and most notably his *Myth of Sisyphus*.[65] It should be noted, though, that the philosophical influences are very broad and are not confined to the absurd, but regardless, the question of man's condition is embedded for Perry in an existential dilemma that has no route of solution outside of man himself.

**The Bible and christotelic growth.** When it comes to the pursuit of intellectual and ethical growth (or wisdom) we are not left without a model. We are called to grow up in wisdom into the perfect form of Christ. Further, Christ himself developed in wisdom, so it is not just the goal; rather it is also the journey. This can be a place where the goal of becoming Christlike can go astray as people only think of his

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[63]Terry D. Cooper, "Pluralism and Religious Belief: Surviving Relativism," *Religious Education* 79, no. 2 (1984): 211.

[64]Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 50.

[65]Ibid., 226.

divine nature and despair of even pursuing Christ's wisdom as our goal. Bruce Ware is very helpful in correcting this. Remarking on Luke's description of Jesus's growing in wisdom,[66] he gives in to wonder, "Amazingly, what both of these verses indicate is that Jesus's wisdom is not a function of his divine nature but is the expression of his *growth as a human being* [emphasis his]."[67] Or as Donald MacLeod notes, "He was born with the mental equipment of a normal child, experienced the usual stimuli and went through the ordinary processes of intellectual development."[68] Jesus in his humanity grew in wisdom through observing God's creation and its order and by being faithful to God's special revelation. This common humanity, though fallen for all those other than Jesus, provides a correspondence to emulate in pursuit of wisdom.

As important as it is to remember that Jesus developed in wisdom thereby giving us a real human example and model, it is also critical to remember how he developed in wisdom. Ware comments on Isaiah 11:1-3, "He will be wise but not wise of himself or wise of his own divine nature per se. Rather he will be wise because the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him, 'the Spirit of wisdom and understanding.'"[69] In summary, we first must remember that we find a valid model in the very human development of Jesus himself, but further that this development in its ordained form is Spirit enabled.

There is another aspect of Christ as our wisdom to which we must pay attention, though, and that is Jesus Christ *is* the wisdom we are called to strive for and that we enjoy in union with him. He is first the personification of wisdom. Colossians 2:3 states "in whom [that is Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."[70]

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[66]Luke 2:40 and 52.

[67]Bruce A. Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 49.

[68]Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998), 164.

[69]Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus*, 51.

[70]For an argument for taking this passage to mean Christ himself is the location of wisdom and knowledge, see Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological*

The second is the relationship we have with wisdom in our union with Christ. Goldsworthy puts it this way, "The Christology of wisdom points to the relationship of the wisdom of God and the wisdom of his trusted creature: man."[71] So, we are called to seek wisdom where it can be found *in Christ* and to accomplish this by being *in Christ*. This is one more way in which Christ is both the gift and the giver (Eph 1:7-10). He has purchased redemption for us through His blood so that we become heirs with Him of all the spiritual gifts including wisdom.

**The Path to Intellectual and Ethical Maturity**

Above, the goal of intellectual and ethical maturity was described. For Perry the goal is an individual capable of making commitments while consciously living in a world of uncertainty and competing claims to knowledge and truth. For the Bible, the goal is to be redeemed as image bearers of God and to grow into the image of Jesus his Son. But, how does this happen? How does one pursue these goals?

**Perry: contextualization and meta-cognition.** Perry makes it abundantly clear that students must move into meta-cognition or meta-thinking (thinking about our thinking) in order to make progress into the upper levels of the scheme. Being able to think about thinking is necessary to understanding the contextual relativism of knowledge at the upper levels of the Perry Scheme. Further, he actually labels the lack of metacognition as "anti-intellectualism."[72] He goes on then, to laud the person who embraces meta-cognition.

In contrast, the liberally educated man, be he a graduate of college or not, is one who has learned to think about even his own thoughts, to examine the way he orders

*Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 195-96.

[71]Graeme Goldsworthy, "Wisdom and Its Literature in Biblical-Theological Context," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 15, no. 3 (September 2011):53.

[72]Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 44.

his data and the assumptions he is making, and to compare these with other thoughts that other men might have.

This then leads right into the implication that this type of thinking reflects the implied contextual relativity of reality.

> If he has gone the whole way, as most of our students have done, he has realized that he thinks this way not because his teachers ask him to but because this is how the world "really is," this is man's present relation to the universe. From this position he can take responsibility for his own stand and negotiate—with respect—with other men.

It is through this "discovery"[73] that the student then is able to continue on toward the desired destination of the "adventure."[74] As we prepare to turn toward the path laid out in Scripture, it should be mentioned that Perry does raise and outline some cognitive skills important to being able to "think about thinking." The issue is that he only sees one desired outcome for gaining this cognitive structure and that is contextual relativism. Eric Johnson has warned that it is more than metacognition that is affecting the participants being described in the Perry Scheme and other developmental descriptions.

> Many college educated young adults do move from belief in a world of Truth and simplicity to a world of ambiguity and complexity, and that part of this movement is due to more advanced, metasystemic thought than the formal thinker can negotiate. This specific process, however, has been somewhat confounded by the moralistic, enlightenment maturity narrative that humans should be on a journey from thoughtless, dependent tradition-bound rationality to reflective, independent, free-thinking rationality.[75]

Perry is certainly caught up in that enlightenment narrative. What is the biblical narrative that corrects this view of maturity?

**Scripture: the Word and the Spirit.** As mentioned previously, this type of advanced and reflective thinking, this meta-cognition, should be thought of as an aspect

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[73]Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 41.

[74]Perry, "Cognitive and Ethical Growth," 85.

[75]Eric L. Johnson, "The Call of Wisdom: Adult Development within the Christian Community, Part I," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 24, no. 2 (July 1996): 90.

of wisdom. The person who has wisdom is able to think about his or her own state and make judgements that take into consideration the limits of our cognitive and epistemic abilities. And, as was discussed above in the section on christotelism, the goal of our development in wisdom is to become like Christ, who both grew in wisdom and is wisdom in his person. Michael Horton points out that this is what distinguishes biblical wisdom from the worldly wisdom available by common grace.[76] So, how do we grow in our Christlikeness? This is essentially the question of how are we sanctified?

Long in his literature review has an expansive discussion of the necessity of the Word and the Spirit as the means of growth in wisdom.[77] This is supported by the Westminster Confession of Faith in Chapter 13 *Of Sanctification*, "They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them." Berkhof notes, "In the application of the work of redemption the two work together, the Spirit using the Word as His instrument."[78] David in Psalm 119:105 gives a beautiful depiction of how God's word becomes the illumination of wisdom for the person who trusts in and follows after the Lord, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Illumination may be one of the key metaphors to understanding the function of the Word of God in the creation of wisdom. The Word removes that darkness that has clouded the cognitive understanding of men and women.

Continuing on with the theme of illumination, it is the Spirit who illuminates the believer allowing him to understand the Word of God and apply it. Returning to the confession in chapter one we read, "Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward

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[76]Michael Scott Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 105.

[77]Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development," 46-49.

[78]Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1933), 307.

illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word."[79] Murray Rae is explicit in connecting the work of the Spirit (and of the Trinity) along with the Word in order to create knowledge in the believer.

> Thus the act of theological inquiry is not an undertaking of the 'old person,' as it were, not of the 'person of flesh,' but of the new person in Christ. It is an action of the person that the knowing subject has become under the transforming impact of God's Word and by the enabling of God's Spirit. Knowledge of God is therefore to be understood as a human action that can only be accounted for as also an action of God.[80]

So, to move beyond solely the Word and Spirit, it will be good to describe the path to wisdom as a Trinitarian path. The way of wisdom is to discover the redemptive, creational order of the Father, as given in Word of God revealed in the Son, and illuminated for the believer by the Holy Spirit. This is the path of true wisdom.

As a person matures in ethics and intellect he grows in his recognition of multiple frames of reference, the importance of self-reflection, and the necessity to make a personal commitment to a way of living that seeks to acquire and improve upon knowledge. On these characteristics, both Perry and the Bible agree. The differences lay in the foundations and goals of personal commitment. The mature individual who has wrestled through the predicament of man as described by Perry has made a commitment to autonomous, contextualized rationality as the highest goal. The mature person who has sought knowledge of God through the help of the Spirit as described in Scripture and modeled by Christ has made a commitment to dependent, contextualized wisdom that finds its end in Christ. It is this second path that we hope to see taken by seminary students.

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[79]Westminster Confession of Faith 1.6.

[80]Murray Rae, "'Incline Your Ear So That You May Live': Principles of Biblical Epistemology," in *The Bible and Epistemology: Biblical Soundings on the Knowledge of God*, ed. Mary Healy and Robin Parry (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2007), 177.

**Describing Evangelical Seminary Education
and its Students**

Considering the ways to describe the particular environment that could be considered fairly common to evangelical seminaries, a helpful visual may be concentric circles with each ring adding a contribution of general observations and characteristics. The first of these rings will be higher education in the United States of America. This outer band does influence the education in seminaries, for instance with the peer pressure (and also state pressure) and public expectation to be accredited. While not all seminaries are accredited by the main agency for seminaries, all the ones from whom participants in this study are drawn are. The next ring is graduate education. Very quickly anyone in an admissions role will determine that it is not just other seminaries that are providing the context (and competition) for our schools; it is also the other professional and academic graduate schools such as M.B.A. programs.[81] The next ring is theological schools. These are the schools who share the common goal to "conduct post baccalaureate professional and academic degree programs to educate persons for the practice of ministry and for teaching and research in the theological disciplines."[82] The final ring is theological schools that are self-identifying as evangelical in their mission and commitments.

What are those things that are at the heart of our set of rings? In other words, what is it that enlivens evangelical seminaries and draws students to them? And, then, thinking of this study in total, what similarities and differences can already be noted between the goals of an evangelical seminary and the goal that Perry set forth of a Harvard-like liberal arts education? In a way, what we need for this study is to construct a representative "dominant message"[83] that will allow for a generalized epistemic force that

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[81]Perhaps less traditional or alternative models should be mentioned as well. Benefiel notes, "Seminaries are not only in competition with one another but also with alternative modalities of ministerial preparation." Ron Benefiel, "The Ecology of Evangelical Seminaries," *Theological Education* 44, no. 1 (2008): 23.

[82]"Welcome!" The Association of Theological Schools, accessed September 17, 2015, http://www.ats.edu/.

[83]See Jackson W. Carroll et al., *Being There: Culture and Formation in Two Theological*

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works upon students in their context. In the evangelical seminary context, the three most highly stressed commitments are likely to be (1) the authority and trustworthiness of Scripture for all matters of faith and life, (2) the necessity of being converted or "born again," and (3) obedience to the Great Commission(s) lived out in personal evangelism and global missions. [84] While evangelical seminaries—like the view of maturity for the Perry Scheme—do stress the necessity for students to make commitments and to live those commitments out, there obviously are other differences in the two goals. For one the knowledge promoted at seminaries is one of dependence, not human autonomy. Seminaries are in the business of forming students, just like the university, but it is into the model of Jesus versus the model of the man who" continuously defines his identity and his involvements in the world."[85] Just as the goals of anthropotelism and christotelism were discussed above, here again they become another way of distinguishing, this time between secular higher education and evangelical higher education.

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*Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[84]Lest one think that the influence is primarily directed toward the evangelical seminary, it is good to note the Hegelian like interaction of evangelical schools and the Association of Theological Schools as noted by Glenn Miller. See Glenn T. Miller, *A Community of Conversation: A Retrospective of The Association of Theological Schools and Ninety Years of North American Theological Education* (Pittsburgh: The Association of Theological Schools, 2008), 25.

[85]Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development*, 150.
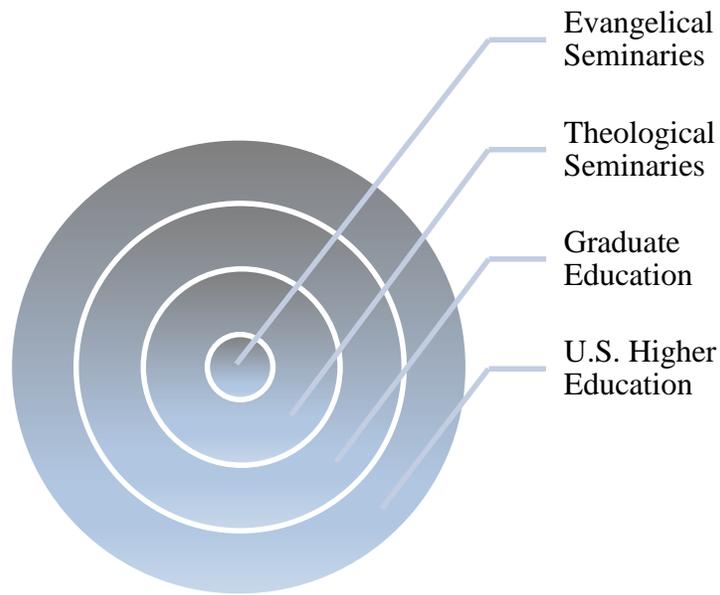
Figure 1. Relationship of evangelical seminaries to higher education

**Evangelical Seminary Students**
**and Development**

   Noted author and seminary professor Steve Brown reminds students that

seminaries are—by their nature—conservatories. They possess the weight of tradition

and established pedagogy, while students on the other hand are in attendance for a

season. This means that the marks left on students will be greater and more immediate

than the marks left on seminaries by their students. This is pointed out because it is a

reminder that the schools and their students should not be assumed to be alike in every

respect. This study may uncover ways in which the cognitively nimble and flexible

student is different from the ponderous and steady institution which he or she attends.

However, the need for the seminary to develop students in areas of reflective and

discerning cognition will hopefully become apparent as well. This would underscore this

statement made by Benefiel.

   It should also be said (hopefully without being presumptuous), that the church needs
   the seminary. The opportunity for students to prepare for ministry in a community
   of theological wisdom made up of people with expertise in theological, biblical,
   historical, missional, pastoral, psychological, and sociological disciplines is nearly

impossible to duplicate in most local congregations.[86]

David Heywood states that how knowledge is typically conceived in modern higher education is actually a very poor fit for the activity of ministerial formation. For ministerial formation it must be understood that "Knowledge consists of actively organized tacit schemas that enable us to adapt intelligently to the situations we face in life."[87] In his conclusion, he draws an even deeper distinction that—while speaking more of theological reflection in general—can be seen to easily give additional clarity to the core differences in the epistemology prized in each arena.

> The contrast is between the epistemology of the Enlightenment tradition, which underlies that of the academy, in which knowledge is understood as an individual possession, explicit, rationally based and aimed at control, and a more venerable and all-embracing approach to learning in which knowledge is understood primarily as tacit—a 'knowing through' rather than 'knowing about'; as shared, emerging from communities of practice; rooted in value rather than reason alone; a matter of faith seeking understanding, in which the knower is shaped by what is to be known.[88]

The seminary student, evangelical or otherwise, is also in interaction with peers as well. These then make up at least three shaping influences that will bear about the development of the student. There are the student's own experiences and environment, the seminary culture and dominant message, and also the interactions with peers.[89]

## The Inverse Consistency Principle

For those that have a Christian worldview based in the special revelation of Holy Scripture, all human development theory must be analyzed through the predominant lens of a biblical theology and particularly, but not limited to, a biblical anthropology.[90]

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[86]Benefiel, "The Ecology of Evangelical Seminaries," 25.

[87]David Heywood, "Educating Ministers of Character: Building Character into the Learning Process in Ministerial Formation," *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 10, no. 1 (May 2013): 17.

[88]Ibid., 22.

[89]Timothy D. Lincoln, "How Master of Divinity Education Changes Students: A Research-based Model," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 13, no. 3 (July 1, 2010): 210-12.

[90]For a justification for the epistemological priority of special revelation and theology, see

Recognizing this imperative, Timothy Paul Jones penned a short but thick proposal for a biblical basis for understanding human development.[91] Building on this foundation, Trentham erected the Inverse Consistency Principle in order to guide interaction with developmental theory, in his particular case the contextual-pragmatic Perry Scheme. He recognized that while researchers can and do accurately describe what happens in human development, if the epistemological assumptions or presuppositions are not consistent with a biblical understanding of fallen humanity and the goal for all to become Christlike, then the interpretation of human development is skewed. Trentham describes the Inverse Consistency Principle this way, "The biblical precedent for growth is consistent with the thought of Perry and Piaget in prescribing the necessity for continual growth and maturation, but it is inversely oriented in its prescribed ultimate goal—Christlikeness (Col 3:10; Rom 8:29)."[92] Thus, for the researcher with biblical presuppositions, a description of human development bedded in redemptive reality must be the positive first step in any interaction with developmental theory. He writes, "From a biblical perspective, utilization of Perry's theory as an interpretive map for describing epistemological development must be 'critically interactive' rather than 'wholly integrative'."[93] What this means in practice is that first a positive description of human development from a biblical perspective must be offered. Then the presuppositions of the developmental theory under study need be determined and stated clearly. Once these two steps are accomplished the biblical perspective is used to critically assess the theoretical presuppositions noting agreement and correcting error in the epistemology of the theory.

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David Powlison, "Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies)," in *The Biblical Counseling Movement: History and Context* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2010), 269-302.

[91]Timothy Paul Jones, "Journeying toward a Biblical Basis for Lifespan Development," published as appendix 1 in Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 223.

[92]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 124.

[93]Ibid., 127.

This then will allow the researcher to benefit from the accurate and insightful observations and conclusions of the developmental model while relating them to the redemptive reality of Scripture. Table 1 displays the results of Trentham's analysis of the Perry Scheme according to the Inverse Consistency Principle.[94]

Table 1. Applying the Principle of Inverse Consistency to the Perry Scheme

| Regarding the limits of formal logic and reason . . . | |
|---|---|
| Perry: Human beings cannot ascertain *Truth* (capital T), only truth—since absolute Truth is illusory. | Scripture: Human beings cannot ascertain Truth (capital T), only *truth*—since absolute Truth is solely and preliminarily determined by an almighty, infinite Creator. |
| There are limits to formal logic and reason, thus *faith commitments are required for knowledge*; belief is basic to knowledge—knowledge is impossible apart from the adoption of an (ungrounded) starting point; faith (conviction) activates belief. [Ref. Polanyi (*Personal Epistemology*), Mavrodes (*Belief in God*) "proved premise principle" and "termination rule"] | |
| Perry: Faith commitment requires "arbitrary faith" and represents the "willing suspension of disbelief." | Scripture: Faith commitment requires "revelatory faith" and represents "the *assurance* of things hoped for; the conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). |
| Regarding the objectivity of knowledge . . . | |
| Perry: All knowledge is mediated by context and no truth claim is objectively justifiable; individuals must therefore "make meaning" for themselves. | Scripture (Reformed Epistemology): All knowledge is mediated by general and special revelation and no knowledge is objectively justifiable; individuals must therefore aim to "think God's thoughts after him" (ref. Bavinck). |
| Regarding contextual knowledge . . . | |
| Perry: Knowledge is contingent on the unique contexts brought to bear in a naturalistic universe, devoid of ultimate purpose and without a foundational metanarrative—thus knowledge must be continually pursued and "created" by human beings according to *internally-based* processes of substantiation. | Scripture: Knowledge is contingent on the unique contexts brought to bear in a God-initiated, God-designed, God-ruled universe, infused with purpose and grounded by the overarching biblical metanarrative—thus knowledge must be continually pursued and "discerned" by human beings according to *revelation-based* processes of substantiation. |

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[94]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 128-129. John David Trentham instructed the author to add the words "and preliminarily" to the Scriptural view of the limits of formal logic and reason based on further refining he has done since the publication of his dissertation.

| Regarding positive maturation . . . | |
|---|---|
| Perry: Given naturalistic reality, successful cognitive growth entails increasing, convictional commitment to one's own values and assumptions—formed on the basis of a critical and reflective criteria of assessment—while remaining open to revision of one's worldview through continual testing and discernment in light of alternate, potentially valid truth claims. | Scripture: Given theistic, Christocentric reality, successful cognitive growth entails increasing, convictional commitment to biblical values and assumptions—formed on the basis of a critical and reflective criteria of assessment—while remaining open to revision of one's worldview through continual testing and discernment in light of alternate, potentially valid truth (not Truth) claims. |
| Regarding commitment . . . | |
| Perry: Commitment involves maintaining one's worldview "with universal intent"-i.e., exercising steadfast, convictional faith, acknowledging that one's commitment is the only means by which to genuinely fulfill one's longing for purposeful identity, albeit through commitments that are arbitrary, groundless, and personally beneficial (ref. Polanyi). | Scripture: Commitment involves maintaining one's worldview "with universal intent"-i.e., exercising steadfast, convictional faith, acknowledging that one's commitment is the only means by which to genuinely fulfill one's longing for purposeful identity, through commitments that enable one to "draw near" to God, seek his will, and serve the benefit of his Kingdom (Heb 11:6). |
| Regarding the "cost" or "risk" of commitment . . . | |
| Perry: The cost of commitment involves abandoning numerous potentialities by wholeheartedly pursuing one's chosen path, so that one may "find his life" and forge his own unique identity in the world. | Scripture: The cost of commitment involves abandoning numerous potentialities by denying oneself, taking up one's cross, and following Christ, so that one may "find his life" by losing it—and pursue his shared identity with Jesus (Matt 16:24). |
| Regarding the role and support of community . . . | |
| Perry: Genuine community engenders a "shared realization of aloneness." | Scripture: Genuine community engenders a shared realization of unified belonging and purpose. |

**Definitions**

As this study stands within an ongoing research project, the definitions below

will be the same—where appropriate— as those developed by Trentham in the progenitor

study.[95]

*Biblical wisdom.* Application of God's revealed truth through the practice of

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[95]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 17-20.

one's daily life, or living skillfully within God's embedded structure.[96]

*Commitment (uppercase C).* A personal affirmation, choice, or decision made—even while acknowledging the contextual nature of knowledge and truth—as a means of defining one's identity and worldview.[97]

*Confessional*. A seminary that subscribes to and is regulated by one of the *historic*, Protestant-evangelical confessions of the Church. Schools that have a statement of faith are labeled simply as evangelical.[98]

*Dualism.* Form of thinking which conceives of all knowledge and meaning as divided into two realms or absolute categories, e.g., good versus bad, right versus wrong, we versus they; all knowledge is regarded as quantitative.[99]

*Evangelical.* This study relies on George Marsden's definition of evangelicals and evangelicalism:

> Evangelicals . . . . are Christians who typically emphasize 1) the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of Scripture; 2) the real, historical character of God's saving work recorded in Scripture; 3) eternal salvation only through personal trust in Christ; 4) the importance of evangelism and missions; and 5) the importance of a spiritually transformed life.[100]

*Inter/multidenominational*: Inter/multidenominational indicates that the school possesses multiple denominational affiliations with respect to governance, financial support, or other formal relationships.[101]

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[96]Daniel J. Estes, Hear My Son: Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1-9 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 26.

[97]Perry, *Forms of Ethical and Intellectual Development*, 150.

[98]See R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Mission, Transmission, and Confession: Three Central Issues in Theological Education," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 13, no. 1 (2009): 4-5.

[99]Perry, "Cognitive and Ethical Growth," 79.

[100]George Marsden, "Introduction: The Evangelical Denomination," in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), ix-x. For a similar, but British, view of the evangelical phenomenon, see D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 1-17. Bebbington has four categories rather than five, but there is validating consistency between the two descriptions even though separated geographically and culturally. For Bebbington the four key characteristics are belief in conversion, activism, Biblicism, and crucicentrism

[101]Association of Theological Schools, accessed January 19, 2016, "Bulletin 51: Membership

*Inverse consistency.* Principle which maintains that secular and biblical models of development observe and prescribe similar patterns, but are inversely oriented with regard to telos (self-identification versus Christlikeness). Secular models observe and prescribe "patterns of fallenness" rather than patterns commensurate with biblical norms.[102]

*Metathinking.* Personalistic form of thinking which recognizes the existence of a plurality of viewpoints about a particular issue, and assumes that judgments cannot be made among opinions; characterized by the statement, "Anyone has a right to his own opinion."[103]

*Perry Scheme.* Most common reference to William G. Perry, Jr.'s model of epistemological development.[104]

*Positions.* Stages of development in the Perry Scheme (1-9), representing a continuum of perspectives regarding knowledge, truth, and authority.[105]

*Relativism.* Form of thinking in which all knowledge and truth is regarded as qualitative and dependent on context for meaning.[106]

*Seminary.* A school that conducts post-baccalaureate professional degree programs to educate persons for the practice of ministry.[107]

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List," http://www.ats.edu/uploads/member-schools/documents/membership-list.pdf.

[102]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 19.

[103]Perry, "Cognitive and Ethical Growth," 88.

[104]Trentham notes the regret that Perry had about this shortening of the name, but nevertheless it stuck. See Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 19 and Perry, "Cognitive and Ethical Growth," 77n1.

[105]Perry, *Forms of Ethical and Intellectual Development*, 287.

[106]Perry, "Cognitive and Ethical Growth," 80.

[107]This definition focuses on the ministerial development aspect and excludes the vocational academic element. Both may be found in theological schools, but the ministerial development aspect is the *sine qua non* of what a seminary is. See Association of Theological Schools, accessed January 19, 2016, http://www.ats.edu/about/overview.

## Research Hypothesis

There are very few studies according to the Perry Scheme that address graduate students.[108] None are known at this point that use evangelical seminarians as the population. There is, though, a study using the related and similar Reflective Judgment Model and in it Janet Dale found no discernable difference in the ratings for evangelical seminarians as compared to other graduate students and controlling for verbal ability.[109] Further, Trentham[110] and Long[111] in their generalized findings did not report a marked difference between students who were committed Christians and the general undergraduate ratings. Therefore, I hypothesized early on in this study that the average epistemological positioning of evangelical seminarians according to the Perry Scheme would be found to be generally consistent with that of other graduate level students and at some level more developed than the undergraduate samples in the previous studies.

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[108]A rare example is Christopher W. Lovell and John Nunnery, "Testing the Adult Development Tower of Babel Hypothesis: Homogeneous by Perry Position Collaborative Learning Groups and Graduate Student Satisfaction," *Journal of Adult Development* 11, no. 2 (April 2004): 139-50. In this sample the researchers found graduate students at all the positions between 2 and 5.

[109]See Janet L. Dale, "Reflective Judgment: Seminarians' Epistemology in a World of Relativism," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 33:1 (2005): 58. She also discovered no discernable difference between entering and graduating seminary students which is now taking on a greater relevance given the findings of this study.

[110]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 150.

[111]Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development," 84-85.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This research study will proceed in most fashions like the family of research studies that preceded it.[1] There will, though, be obvious differences given the distinguishing characteristics of the population. The methodology of this study will remain close to that of previous studies except for instances that a small variation is necessitated by the differences between undergraduate and graduate populations.

**Research Questions Synopsis**

1. What is the nature of epistemological development of evangelical seminarians according to the Perry Scheme?

2. What is the variance, if any, in the epistemological development of evangelical seminarians among those attending evangelical seminaries with various organizational missions?

   a. What is the relationship between attendance at a denominational seminary and progression through the positions of the Perry Scheme?[2]

   b. What is the relationship between attendance at an inter/multidenominational seminary and progression through the positions of the Perry Scheme?

3. How do evangelical seminarians describe the seminary experience in relationship to their own development?

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[1]For convenience the four preceded studies are cited here. John David Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates: A Cross Institutional Application of the Perry Scheme" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012); Gregory Brock Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development of Pre-Ministry Undergraduates at Bible Colleges According to the Perry Scheme" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014); Bruce Richard Cannon, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates Attending Confessional Christian Liberal Arts Colleges or Universities" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015); Christopher Lynn Sanchez, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates Attending Secular Universities" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015).

[2]For definition of inter/multidenominational see the definitions section on p. 50 of this study.

## Research Purpose Statement

The intent of this study was to explore the nature of epistemological development in evangelical seminarians across different institutional contexts, using the Perry Scheme as a theoretical lens.

## Design Overview

This qualitative study followed the precedent methodology for the Perry Scheme in general and the study of Pre-Ministry undergraduates performed by John David Trentham in particular. The difference was the population. The population consisted of evangelical Master of Divinity students who are attending or have attended two institutional types. The institutions all shared an evangelical identity. The two types are denominational and inter/multidenominational. The research project collected 30 interviews with 15 from each institution type. The researcher identified possible institutions through the study of statements of faith, institutional histories, and mission statements. From that pool of possible institutions, selections were made according to pragmatic concerns such as access.

The study employed semi-structured interviews to provide significant self-reporting by seminary students to the extent that their progression though the positions of the Perry Scheme can be rated. [3] The marginally unique interview protocol was based on the Trentham Interview Protocol (see appendix 4) with modifications necessitated by differences in populations and research questions and remained in the general arc of the Standardized Perry Interview Protocol (see appendix 2) and the Alternate Perry Interview Protocol (see appendix 3). The interviews posed open ended questions and then further probing questions were used as warranted. The goal was to elicit the students' self-reflective understanding of cognitive and ethical decisions and how those decisions were

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[3]Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 10th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2013), 190.

made. This provided ample evidence for William S. Moore the rater at the Center for the Study of Intellectual Development (see appendix 5) who evaluated transcribed copies of the interviews. Also, it was intended that these interviews would provide additional insight by way of independent analysis using John David Trentham's developing taxonomy of epistemological priorities and competencies. This independent analysis was an involved and fruitful process of identifying statements that spoke to one of ten areas of epistemological maturity that have been developed by Trentham "based on epistemological priorities and values synthesized from biblical-theological sources and Perry-related sources."[4] The robust process of this analysis is detailed further in the section on the independent content analysis later in this chapter.

## Population

The population for this study was defined by two characteristics. First, the students were enrolled in a theological seminary and earned a Master of Divinity degree, the typical degree for vocational ministry preparation.[5] Second, they are self-identifying evangelicals meaning they are "Christians who typically emphasize 1) the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of Scripture; 2) the real, historical character of God's saving work recorded in Scripture; 3) eternal salvation only through personal trust in Christ; 4) the importance of evangelism and missions; and 5) the importance of a spiritually transformed life."[6]

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[4]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 137n8.

[5]Only schools accredited by The Association of Theological of Schools (ATS) were considered for this study. Since ATS maintains and enforces standards for degrees offered by member schools this reduces the potential variability in curriculum and other elements of education among the schools that contribute to the population.

[6]George Marsden, "Introduction: The Evangelical Denomination," in *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), ix-x.

## Sample

The sample group was chosen from two institutional contexts that state as their mission serving students that belong to this population. The two institutional contexts are denominational and inter/multidenominational. These two contexts do not exhaust every type of school that serves this population but do capture the majority of schools. Limiting the institutional contexts will allow the study to compare the development of evangelical seminarians at the two most likely institutional contexts. This produced a purposeful sample that can be studied in a rich and deep manner while remaining within the scope of this thesis. This type of sampling is associated with qualitative research and is recognized that it "will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research questions."[7]

## Delimitations

1. The sample was delimited to male students. A forthcoming study to be undertaken by Jennifer Kintner will be delimited to female students.

2. The sample was delimited to students in an ATS approved Master of Divinity degree program since this is still the common degree that is found across seminaries. This helped to reduce curriculum variability among the participants.

3. The sample was delimited to students in the final term of study or having graduated within six months of the time of the interview. This delimitation was necessary since the second research question has to do with the possible influence that the institutional context has had in epistemological development.

4. The sample was delimited to students thirty years of age or younger. This minimized the effects of intervening vocational experience on the development of participants' epistemology.[8]

5. Participants were delimited to those that have completed at least 75 percent of studies at degree conferring institution.

6. Participants were delimited to those that have utilized distance education for no more than 25 percent of the degree requirements. Some of the anticipated influences on

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[7]John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches,* 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 189.

[8] Marcia B. Baxter Magolda, "Evolution of a Constructivist Conceptualization of Epistemological Reflection," *Educational Psychologist* 39 no.1 (2004): 38.

epistemological development (peers and friends, mentors and professors, seminary culture) may be absent or diminished in the distance setting.

## Limitations of Generalization

1. As with studies of this nature the conclusions of this study are only generalizable to the institutional contexts of the participants.

2. Since participants were delimited to the male gender, the findings of this study are not wholly generalizable to the female gender. However, the differences in the ways in which the genders rate on the Perry Scheme are not so drastic that the findings are wholly irrelevant for female students who otherwise align with the delimitations of the sample. Further, data on female students will be available in the forthcoming study by Jennifer Kintner.

3. The population was delimited to self-identifying evangelicals, so there is limited generalizability for seminary students with other theological commitments.

4. The population was delimited to ATS approved Master of Divinity students. Other seminary degree programs can have significant differences in curriculum and other educational factors so generalization to non-ATS approved Master of Divinity seminary students is consequently a factor of the similarity of their enrolled degree program to an ATS approved Master of Divinity degree program.

## Instrumentation

For the semi-structured interviews I developed an interview protocol in consultation with my thesis supervisor. The protocol is an adaptation and revision of the Trentham Interview Protocol. The protocol is comprised of open-ended questions and suggested probes designed to elicit deeper and more specific articulations of epistemological positions.

**Thesis Study Participation Form**

This study used a modified version of Trentham's Dissertation Study Participation Form.[9] The Thesis Study Participation Form for this research study is found in appendix 1. Along with documenting the informed consent of participants, this form

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[9]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 224-25.

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was also used to collect pertinent information about the experiences and history of participants. This additional information was analyzed by the researcher. It offered additional insights into the background and development of this purposeful sample of evangelical seminary students.

**Interview Protocol**

Previous studies have used the Standardized Perry Interview Protocol, Alternate Perry Interview Protocol, and Trentham Interview Protocol.[10] I developed a modified protocol based on the Trentham Interview Protocol (appendix 4) that also remained in the general arc of the Standardized Perry Interview Protocol (appendix 2) and the Alternate Perry Interview Protocol (appendix 3).

## Procedures

The procedures for this study in general mirrored very closely the procedures of the studies before it with some differences due to the unique research sub-questions and population being studied. This study benefits from the established procedures of the previous Perry Scheme studies while at the same time advancing the project into a distinctively new population.

**Recruit Study Participants**

Thirty participants were recruited from evangelical seminaries of the two institutional types. Leveraging the network of connections built over my fifteen years of seminary administration, participants were recruited from a total of six institutions and one of the institutions, Reformed Theological Seminary, has four campuses represented in the sample.

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[10]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 229-30.

**Conduct a Pilot Study**

Before the recruiting of the sample was underway, I recruited two students from my own campus for a pilot study. The purpose of this pilot study was to allow for me to practice interviewing and for sample interview transcripts to be produced. The sample interview transcripts were evaluated by my doctoral supervisor John David Trentham with whom I would evaluate the study participant transcripts for the presence the epistemological priorities and competencies in his developing taxonomy and William Moore at the CSID who provides the Measure of Intellectual Development (MID) ratings for this line of Perry Scheme studies. This evaluation gave indications of needed improvements in me as the interviewer and validated the instrumentation.

**Conduct, Transcribe, and Submit**
**Interviews for Scoring**

The pilot interviews were conducted in person. The interviews of the research sample were all conducted by phone since no participants were local. Transcription of the recordings was outsourced to a reliable, professional transcriber used for past research studies. Transcriptions of the interviews were forwarded to CSID for scoring.

**Independent Content Analysis**

I performed an independent content analysis of the transcripts, based on the procedure of precedent studies, while the transcripts were in the process of being scored by CSID. The independent content analysis used the categorization by John David Trentham of epistemological priorities and competencies. This developing taxonomy is presented below in table 2. [11] The first step was for me to make attributions when I thought there was sufficient evidence for at least a suspicion of the presence of one of the epistemological priorities and competencies. I say suspicion since I was a novice rater for this classification system. Using a 'wide net' like this accomplished two things. It

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[11]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 137.

ameliorated the potential for me to overlook or dismiss subtle evidences of these developmental identifications. Also, having an abundance of attestations proved fruitful in spurring dialogue between Trentham and me helping to further refine and clarify the boundaries of the epistemological priorities and competencies. The next step was the scoring by Trentham which he returned to me with comments for his approving or dismissing particular attestations. In addition to supporting his decisions, he noted emerging themes that he noticed from the abundance of attestations. I reviewed his scoring and then negotiated any attestations that I thought should be included that he dismissed. These negotiations further clarified our use of the classifications and improved my ability to identify statements according to this taxonomy.

Table 2. Trentham's epistemological priorities and competencies

| I. Biblically-founded presuppositions for knowledge and development | II. Metacognition, critical reflection, and contextualistic orientation | III. Personal responsibility for knowledge acquisition and maintenance-within community |
|---|---|---|
| A recognition of the God of the Bible as metaphysically ultimate, and of revelation as the source and most basic component for knowledge and development | A preference for higher-level forms of thinking according to Bloom's taxonomy | A pursuit of personal development that results from mutual interdependence and reciprocity in one's relationships with authority figures and peers |
| A clear articulation of the knowledge relationship between faith and rationality | A prioritization of wisdom-oriented modes of learning and living | A sense of personal responsibility for gaining, maintaining, and progressing in knowledge |
| | A reflective criteria of assessing one's own beliefs and values, as well as divergent beliefs and values | A preference for active involvement in the teaching and learning process |
| | A recognition of social-environmental influences on one's learning and maturation | A convictional commitment to one's own worldview–maintained with critical awareness of personal contexts, ways of thinking, and challenges brought to bear by alternative worldviews–through testing and discernment |

**Evaluate Findings and Draw Conclusions**

The concluding phase of the methodology commenced once CSID delivered the scores of the interview participants. CSID uses the Measure of Intellectual Development (MID) as its internal rating procedure.[12] These scores were analyzed in tandem with the independent evaluation done using the epistemological priorities and competencies of John David Trentham. Drawing from these two perspectives, conclusions and final thoughts are offered.

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[12]See appendix 7.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This study has both continuity and discontinuity with the studies done in the past few years by John David Trentham, Gregory Brock Long, Bruce Richard Cannon, and Christopher Lynn Sanchez. The continuous features are the use of the Perry Scheme as the theoretical lens, the use of purposeful sampling and semi-structured interviews for the qualitative research methodology, the scoring of the interviews by William Moore using the Measure of Intellectual Development (MID), and the independent analysis employing Trentham's epistemological priorities and competencies. The discontinuous aspects are the population composed of graduate-level seminary students versus undergraduate students in the preceding studies, single gender sampling, and a slightly altered interview protocol necessitated by the difference in population. It should be noted, though, that in another respect, this population is a continuation of previous studies. The previous studies were composed of students who were pre-ministry and likely to attend seminary. This current study can be conceived of as a cross-sectional study or even a quasi-longitudinal study in that it examines a slightly older population that is representative of what the samples before were heading towards, i.e. the successful completion of a seminary education.

One other difference that may be noted by readers comparing this study to the predecessor studies is the additional amount of information collected in the Thesis Study Participant Form (see appendix 1). Since the population is new for this series of studies, and since this population has been underrepresented in similar studies, additional information was solicited from prospective participants. This additional data can suggest further avenues for research of this population. I also describe the data compilation

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protocol with a concern to offer helpful suggestions for this stage for future researchers. The recruiting of the interview participants and the conducting of the interviews were a work in progress and I made changes along the way that could be helpful to put in place at the outset in the future.

## Compilation Protocol

The data collection stage of the study began in early February of 2016 with the recruiting of two participants for the pilot study. The participants were selected from the seminary where I work since these interviews would not be included in the final analysis. The purpose of the interviews was to test the interview protocol and the interviewer. The two interviews were conducted over lunch at a restaurant since I was familiar and friendly with the participants. I recommend against this setting for future research interviews. The interruptions from helpful wait staff disrupted the flow of thoughts and reflections and the background noise on the recording made the job of the transcriber more difficult than it needed to be.

The two recordings were transcribed professionally by Brooke Markwell who also transcribed the subsequent thirty research interviews. Using a transcriber is a decision each researcher must make for oneself. There is a financial cost, but given the time constraints on researchers with full-time employment, it can be worth it. The total cost for transcription for this project (32 interviews) was $898.74. I estimate it saved me about 70 hours of work even with having to check each interview and fill in sections that the transcriber marked as inaudible,

The pilot study transcripts were sent to William Moore on February 22, 2016 and received back with a score and notes on March 8, 2016. Moore was able to assign a MID score to each interview so this validated the Stuckert Interview Protocol (see appendix 5) as a successful adaptation of the Trentham Interview Protocol (see appendix 4), which was expected. Moore made coaching comments on each of the transcripts to

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help me to develop better interview skills. Below is a summary list of useful interview tips that I compiled from William Moore's feedback to me.

1. Avoid questions that can be answered simply with a yes or a no.

2. Avoid asking more than one question at a time.

3. Allow the interviewee to struggle with answering a question, do not jump in and try to save the interviewee.

4. Avoid leading the interviewee in a question.

5. Start with broad, open-ended questions and then follow with more narrow, probing questions.

While I was waiting on the results of the pilot study, I began contacting seminary administrators in my relational network. The goal at the outset was to collect ten interview participants from each of three institutional types. The initial types were confessional and denominational, confessional and inter/multidenominational, and evangelical inter/multidenominational. It was decided in consultation with my adviser once the actual compilation was underway to both clarify and simplify the institutional types. It was simplified to two types and clarified to be denominational and inter/multidenominational.

I began with schools at which I had a solid relational lead among the administration or faculty. These included The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Covenant Theological Seminary, Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, Orlando, Charlotte, and Washington, D.C., campuses), and Westminster Seminary California. The administrators and faculty in this close relational group all provided assistance in recruiting participants. This ranged from sending me lists of graduates along with email addresses, to sending out information to graduates under their own email, to in one case a professor encouraging students in a particular capstone experience class to participate. Later I would reach out to administrators at six more schools. Of these, only two provided participants. There was a clear benefit to being able to call upon existing

relationships in this process. It would be advantageous for future researchers to cultivate relationships at schools that may provide participants. Overall, though, over half of schools contacted participated (see table 3) which should be considered a success.

Potential participants were sent information about the study along with a link to the Google form for potential participants. This information was disseminated through email, the class room, and student newsletters. A total of fifty-seven potential participants completed the form between March 3, 2016 and June 2, 2016. At first most of the respondents were chosen to participate, but toward the end it became more difficult to get the final, qualified participants needed to represent the inter/multidenominational institutional type with only three of the last ten being chosen and scheduled for interviews. This is a good reminder for those with significant selection criteria for participants. The rate at which your recruiting starts may be much more rapid than the way it ends and so starting early and aggressively recruiting will help keep your project on schedule. I started with a $10 Amazon Gift Card as an incentive to participate. At about the halfway mark, I added a $5 Amazon Gift Card for referrals and an Amazon Fire Tablet giveaway to spur involvement. This did help. I had more than a few students that expressed to me that they were motivated by the incentives. In the future, I would start with the full range of incentives at the beginning if the time for recruitment is a concern.

Table 3. Institutional participation requests and responses

|  | Contacted | Positive responses | Negative or no response | Participated |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Seminary administrators and faculty | 13 | 10 | 3 | 9 |
| Students | Unknown | 58 | Unknown | 30 |

Interviews were successfully conducted with thirty seminary graduates—or students in their last term of seminary—from a total of nine seminaries. The seminaries are given below along with the institutional type and number of participants for each.

Three schools (counting the four campuses of Reformed Theological Seminary as one)
each provide approximately a fourth of participants with the three remaining schools
(Westminster Philadelphia and Westminster California have no institutional connections)
provide the last fourth of participants (see table 4).

Table 4. Participation by institution

| Name of seminary | Institutional type | Number of participants |
|---|---|---|
| Covenant Theological Seminary | denominational | 7 |
| Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary | inter/multidenominational | 4 |
| Reformed Theological Seminary/Charlotte | inter/multidenominational | 1 |
| Reformed Theological Seminary/Jackson | inter/multidenominational | 2 |
| Reformed Theological Seminary/Orlando | inter/multidenominational | 3 |
| Reformed Theological Seminary/Washington D.C. | inter/multidenominational | 2 |
| The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary | denominational | 8 |
| Westminster Theological Seminary | inter/multidenominational | 2 |
| Westminster Seminary California | inter/multidenominational | 1 |

**Participation Form Data**

The form for this study was expanded from the preceding studies. I added
questions with the thought that this was a newer population for this study and so the
opportunity to gather additional data about the population should not be missed. The data
gathered by the form provides indicators of additional areas for research in the future
even beyond intellectual and ethical development.

For the table and figures below all of the fifty-nine form participants are
considered to give a larger sample size. The first data set to be considered are those
binary values (yes/no questions) that primarily give us demographical information about
evangelical seminarians.

Table 5. Binary data from all participation forms

|  | Yes | No |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Belongs to a denomination | 53 | 6 |
| Subscribes to a confession | 52 | 7 |
| Grew up in the church | 51 | 8 |
| Attended more than one college or university | 23 | 36 |
| Worked between college and seminary | 30 | 29 |
| Had a mentor during seminary | 30 | 29 |
| Took distance courses during seminary | 31 | 28 |
| Full-time student | 54 | 4 |
| On campus student | 30 | 28 |

The form included six questions that asked for responses on a Likert scale from very important to not important. The results for all respondents are presented in charts below indicating the number of responses for each qualitative description. For most questions, the overall response is positive. If I were to do this again now, I would instead ask students to sort these six influences by order of importance in order to get a better idea of all these "good" things which were the most important to students.

The chart that is a little more "flat" regards the importance of field education. In the interviews it came out that many were already very involved in the church and felt that the supervised field education by the seminary was just "going through the motions" and did not add much to their seminary experience or preparation for ministry.
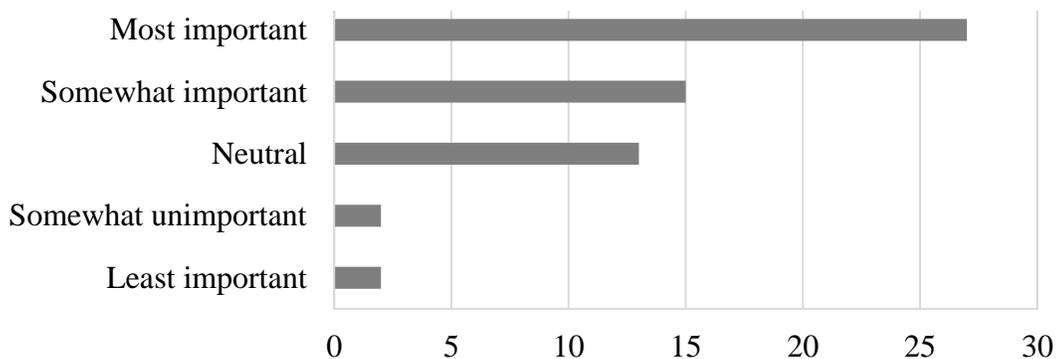


Figure 2. Rating of the importance of friends and peers to the seminary experience
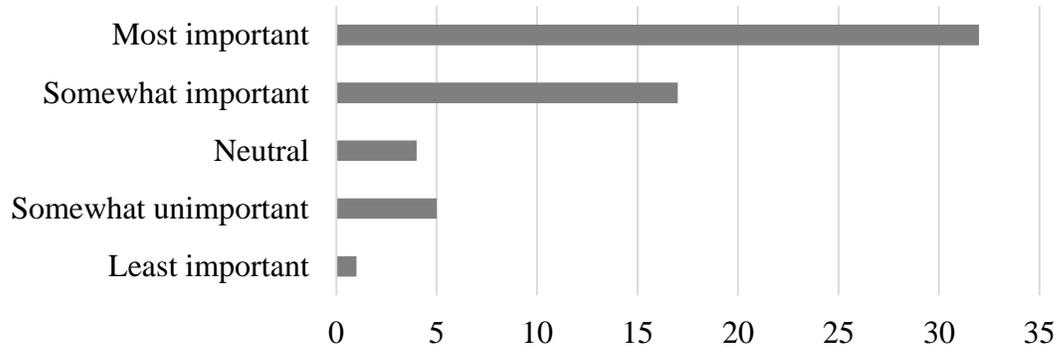
Figure 3. Rating of the importance of professors to the seminary experience
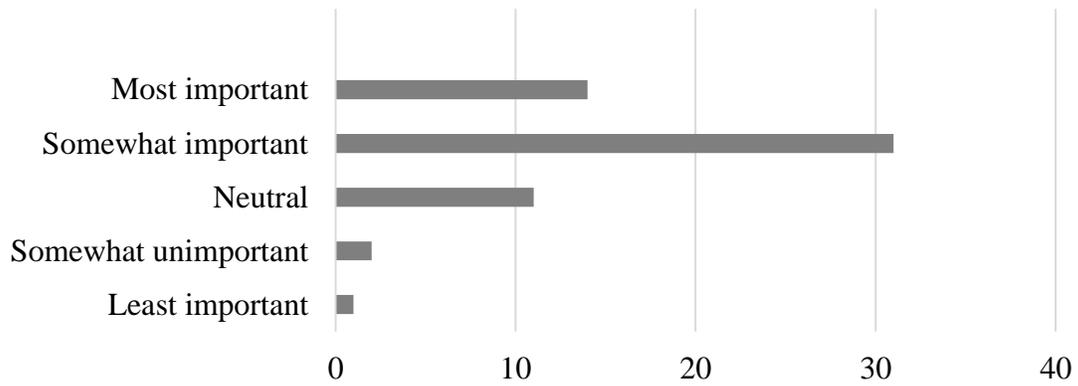


Figure 4. Rating of the importance of required reading to the seminary experience
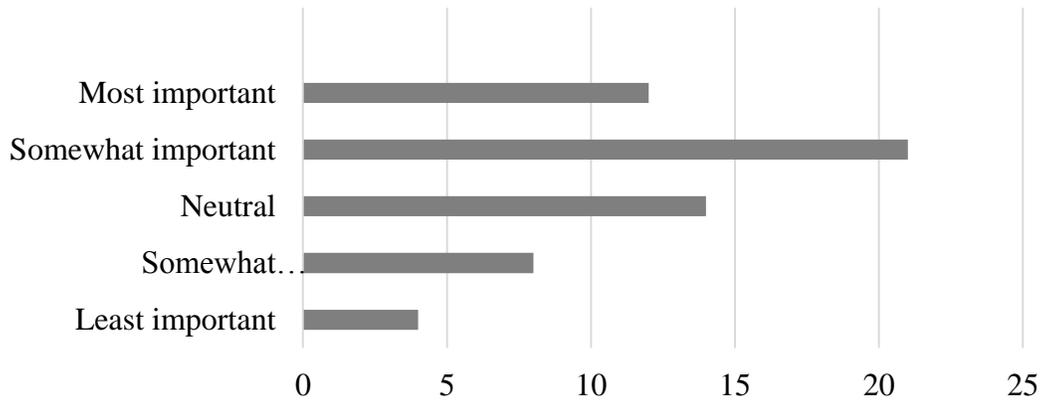


Figure 5. Rating of the importance of seminary culture to the seminary experience
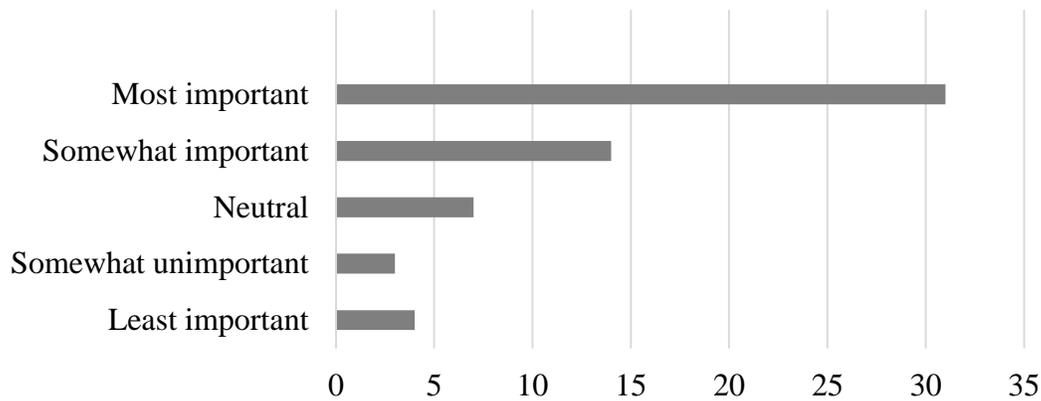
Figure 6. Rating of the importance of local church involvement
to the seminary experience
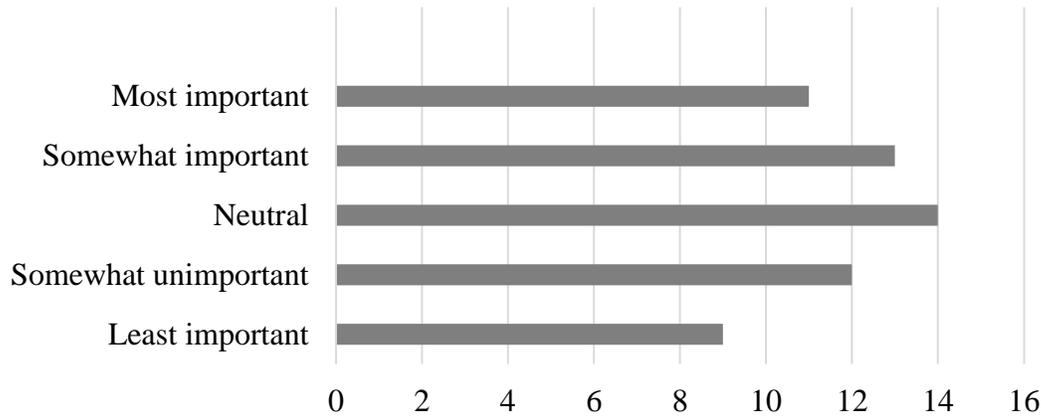


Figure 7. Rating of the importance of supervised field
education to the seminary experience

The following charts compare the two institutional types. There were thirty-one
respondents from denominational schools and twenty-eight from inter/multidenominational
schools. For the most part, both groups perceived the same importance from the variety
of influences and impacts given in the form. The really interesting chart is in figure 11. In
this chart we see that there is a slightly greater overall importance on seminary culture in
the inter/multi/denominational students. I would have expected this to be different since
the denominational schools have a more concentrated identity, so it could be that the
culture of the school is stronger and makes a greater impact. Also, since it is so closely
tied to the students' churches, in most cases, there may be a greater identification with the

school culture by those in the denominational schools. However, for this sample, the responses from inter/multidenominational students are more concentrated in the most important and somewhat important ratings. Since the question was not very specific, we cannot surmise if the culture that was important to the students was that of the students themselves, the organization, or even the locale and surrounding religious and civic culture.[1] If a question like this is included in future studies it may be worthwhile to make these distinctions in order to gain greater insight as to what facet of seminary culture is making the greatest impact according to students.
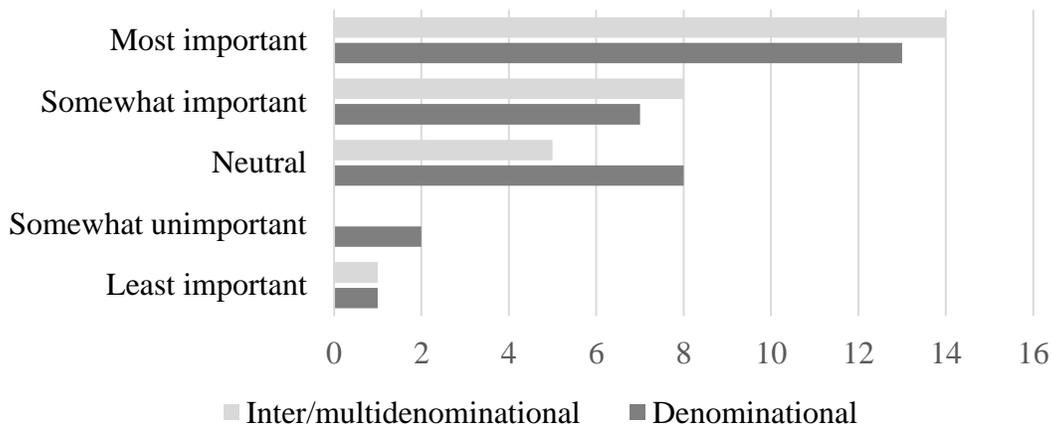


Figure 8. Rating of the importance of friends and peers to the seminary experience compared by institutional types

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[1]Jackson W. Carroll et al., *Being There: Culture and Formation in Two Theological Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4-6.
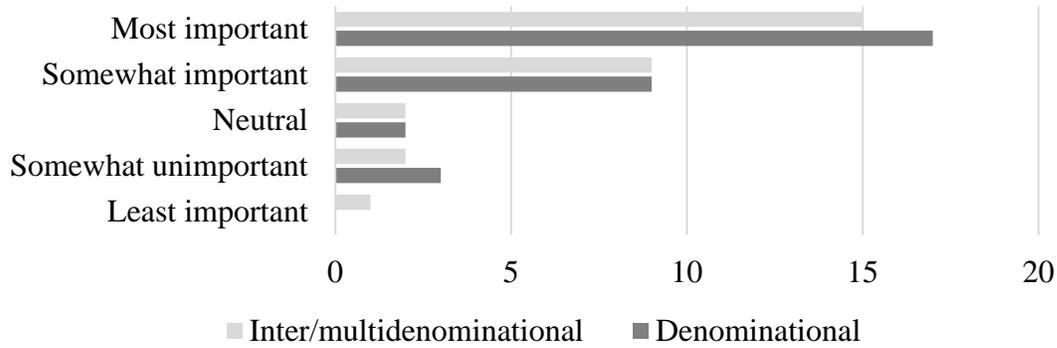
Figure 9. Rating of the importance of professors to the seminary experience compared by institutional types
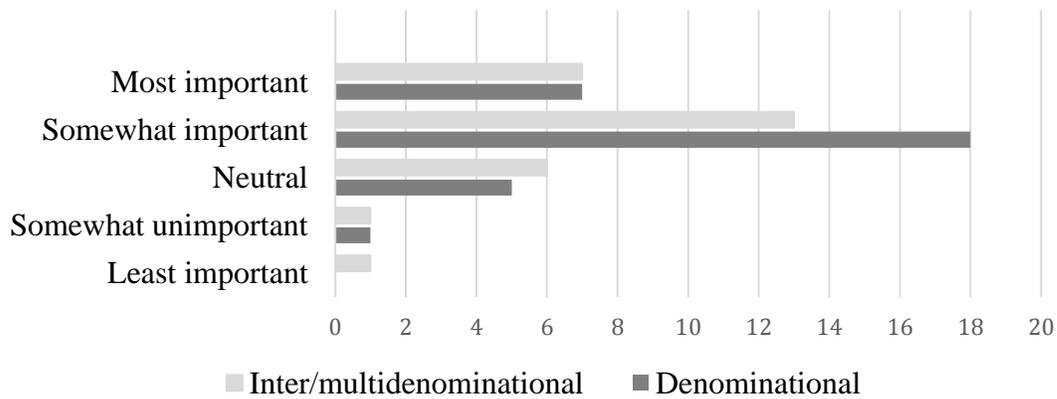


Figure 10. Rating of the importance of required reading to the seminary experience compared by institutional types
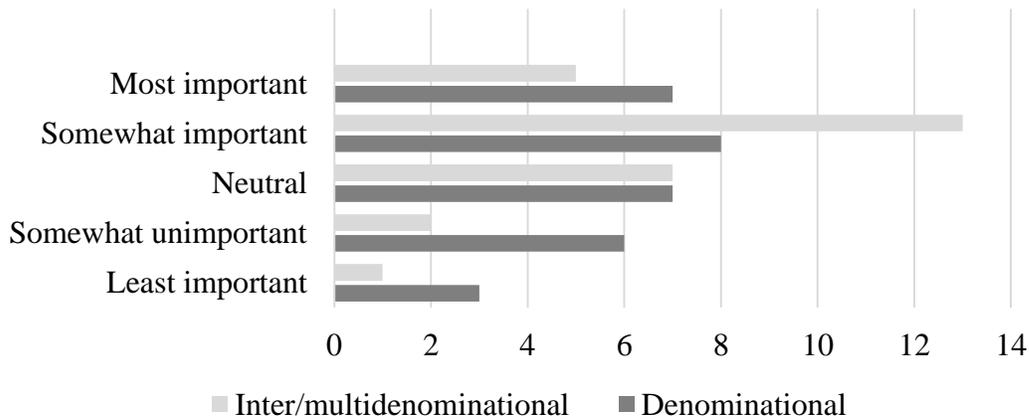


Figure 11. Rating of the importance of seminary culture to the seminary experience compared by institutional type
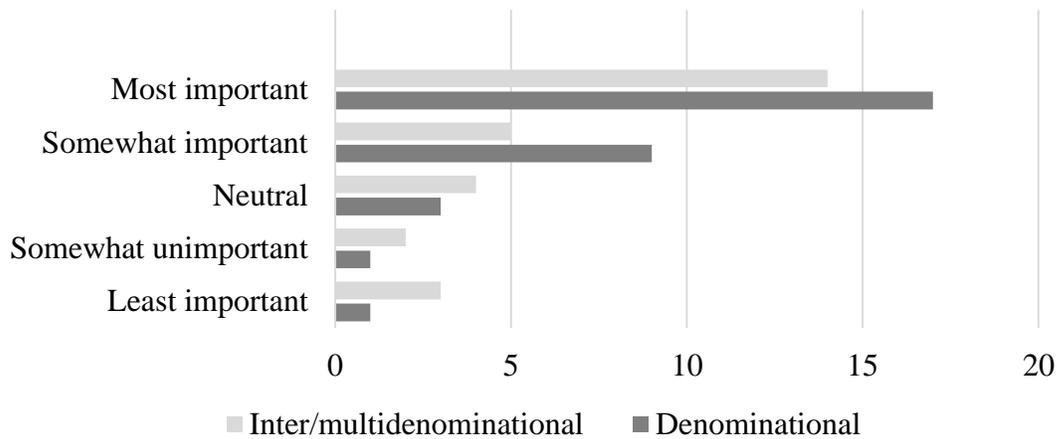
Figure 12. Rating of the importance of local church involvement to the seminary experience compared by institutional type
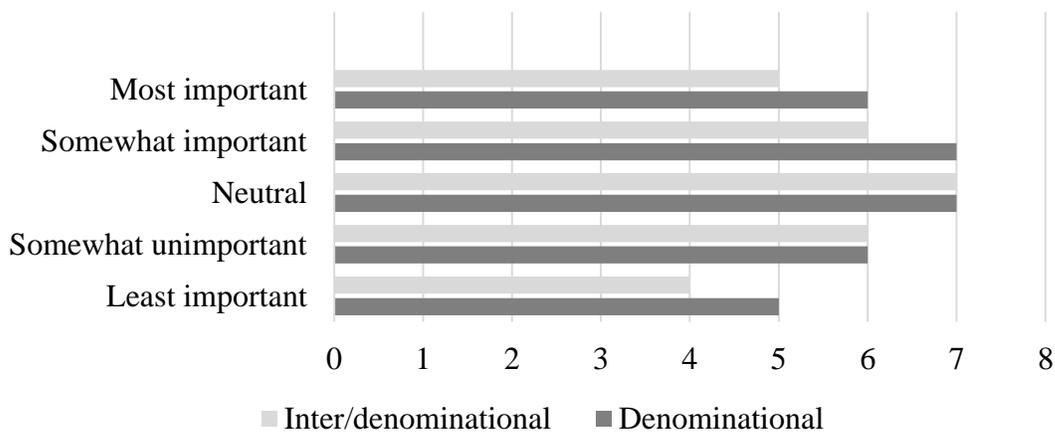


Figure 13. Rating of the importance of supervised field education to the seminary experience compared by institutional type

## Research Question Synopsis

The research questions and sub-questions that have guided the study's direction, are then given again below.

1. What is the nature of epistemological development of evangelical seminarians according to the Perry Scheme?

2. What is the variance, if any, in the epistemological development of evangelical seminarians among those attending evangelical seminaries with various organizational missions?

a. What is the relationship between attendance at a denominational seminary and progression through the positions of the Perry Scheme?

b. What is the relationship between attendance at an inter/multidenominational seminary and progression through the positions of the Perry Scheme?

3. How do evangelical seminarians describe the seminary experience in relationship to their own development?

## Summary of Findings

In this section, the findings from the interviews are presented. This includes the reported ratings from CSID according to the MID. These ratings are tabulated and presented in various ways. First, the ratings are presented in a generalized manner. This view is important to answering the first research question. Next the scores are compared between the two institutional types which informs the answer to the second research question. Then individual sections of certain participant's interviews are explored as they contribute to the designation of MID ratings. These excerpts along with the analysis of the transcripts according to the classifications of Trentham's epistemological priorities and competencies provide the data for the answering of the third research question.

First, a brief explanation of how the scores are reported by position and then turned into numerical scores that can be manipulated statistically and otherwise. The CSID Interview Scoring Procedure and Reporting Explanation found in appendix 7 gives the most complete explanation, but generally speaking the scores are delivered using a three digit number that will place a score on a scale that goes from position 2 to position 5 with two steps between each. So, a score of 222 is stable position 2 with no transition. And a score of 334 is dominant position 3 opening to position 4. And a score of 455 is dominant position 5 trailing position 4. There are some further nuances to the scoring method that can be found in the appendix, but this gives enough information to translate the three digit scores develivered by the CSID. The second step, then, for better data analysis in this report is to take these categorical scores and then translate them into numerical scores. This is done by moving from 2.00 to 5.00 with two steps between each.

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So, for instance, the score 222 above is 2.00 since it is a stable position 2 rating, and the

score 334 above is 3.33 since it is a dominant position 3 opening (or glimpsing) position

4, and the score 455 is 4.66 since it is dominant position 5 trailing position 4. This is a

very basic presentation of how the scoring is reported categorically and then translated to

numeric scores that should suffice for the following data reporting and analysis.
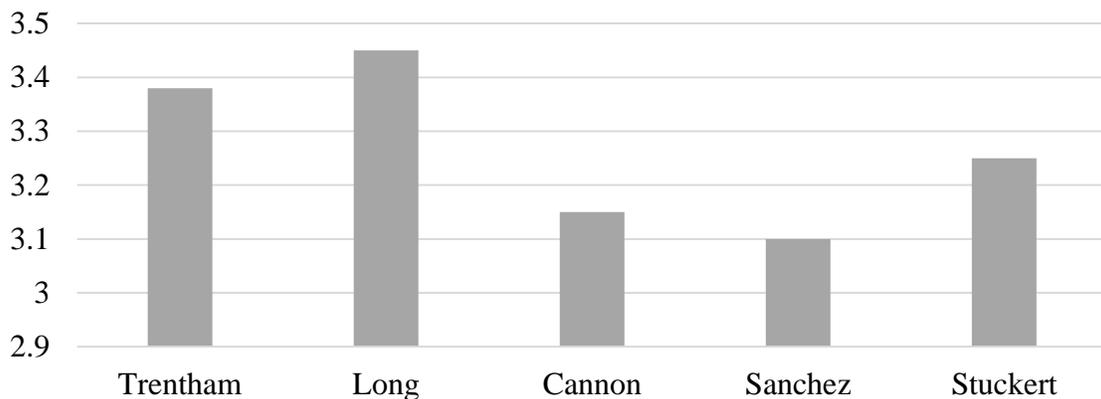


Figure 14. MID mean scores

The MID scores received from William Moore at the CSID were surprising. To

set the context, in the precedent studies the average of scores by study ranged from 3.10

to 3.45.[2] All the researchers for these studies commented on how this was in line with the

normal graduating college student, somewhere in the transition between position 3 and

position 4. The CSID Interview Scoring Procedure and Reporting Explanation found in

appendix 7 offers this generalization of expected MID scores, "In general, traditionally-

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[2]The mean scores can be found at the following page numbers: John David Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates: A Cross Institutional Application of the Perry Scheme" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 50; Gregory Brock Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development of Pre-Ministry Undergraduates at Bible Colleges According to the Perry Scheme" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 86; Bruce Richard Cannon, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates Attending Confessional Christian Liberal Arts Colleges or Universities" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 71; Christopher Lynn Sanchez, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates Attending Secular Universities" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 69.

aged students enter college in the position 2-position 3 transition and exit college 4 (or so!) years later in the position 3-position 4 transition." Therefore, it was surprising to me that the mean numerical score for this population of graduate level seminarians is 3.25, right in the heart of the range seen with the previous four groups of graduating college students.

The first research question is: What is the nature of epistemological development of evangelical seminarians according to the Perry Scheme? According to this data from the CSID, the obvious and short answer must be that the nature of epistemological development among evangelical seminarians is within the same range as that of evangelical undergraduates. Why this is so then becomes the larger question. There are some possibilities that I explored while analyzing this data.

I corresponded with William Moore to see if there was a generalized positioning for graduate students such as was listed for undergraduates in the the CSID Interview Scoring Procedure and Reporting Explanation. He responded graciously in an email that there is not and that positioning for graduate students is not very straightforward. His response is below.

> Not really, mostly because the number of graduate students we've sampled over the years hasn't been anywhere near as large and varied as the number and diversity of undergraduate students. That said, setting aside age as a separate and interacting variable, it's reasonable to expect based on the undergraduate data that students moving into graduate school will generally enter in the 3/4 transition (although for any given sample, without knowing the undergraduate starting points it's really hard to say for sure). Given the wide range of graduate school programs, experiences and durations, and the fact that grad school is typically even less explicitly focused than most undergraduate programs in promoting intellectual development and cognitive complexity, it's hard to say what a typical end point is.
>
> I wish I had a more straightforward answer for you, but as Bernice Neugarten noted some time ago,[3] the general developmental reality is that as people get older their lived experiences diverge more and more so assessing developmental perspectives gets messier and more complex at the same time. It's a key reason why the Perry

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[3]For an example of her thoughts on this divergence see this reflective piece from late in her career, Bernice Levin Neugarten, "Growing as Long as We Live," *Second Opinion* 15 (November 1990): 42-51.

ratings should only be one aspect of analyzing data like your interviews; the qualitative and thematic analyses of the respondents' perspectives on their experiences provides a richer and nuanced complementary understanding of their developmental "position" in the world![4]

His reply that "as people get older their lived experiences diverge more and more" directed my attention to the Inverse Consistency Principle. Could we be observing the beginning of the inversion here with seminary students? In other words, yes, they are continuing to develop epistemologically during the seminary experience, but in an inverse manner than what is noted in psychometrics like the MID and the Perry Scheme.

That seminary students may be developing epistemologically, but not necessarily in the cognitive realm is another idea I considered. Since the seminary experience is so much about being formed as a Christian, the growth to the student's view on knowledge and the justification of knowledge may be happening more outside of the arena of cognition. James K. A. Smith in arguing for greater attention to the whole student in Christian higher education, not just the brain, writes about this type of alternative growth.

> Such formation is largely affective and precognitive, shaping our adaptive unconscious; but because we are affective, imaginative creatures, this makes such formation all the more powerful and effective (even if it might also be covert and subterranean).[5]

In seminary, the goals for epistemology should be fundamentally different than in a graduate philosophy program or law school, as examples. Dru Johnson in making his case to let the prophetic voices of the Bible provide the authentication of our knowledge offers that the epistemological goal for the believer should be "what is espoused in Scripture: to know God and his Kingdom (Exod 6:7; Mark 4:11; 9:1)."[6] This type of learning does seem to be taking place among the seminarians studied. As John David

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[4]William S. Moore, e-mail message to author, September 28, 2016.

[5]James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 215.

[6]Dru Johnson, *Biblical Knowing: A Scriptural Epistemology of Error* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 205.

Trentham and I analyzed the interviews we noted that the seminarians in this sample largely spoke of utilization of knowledge in further developing ministry technique along with an increasing appreciation for personal devotion.

Trentham has presented some initial speculations to a forum of faculty and Ph.D. students based on the results from this study (see appendix 12). Suggesting that our results may indicate that seminarians are "no more mature in their ways of knowing, critical reasoning, and creative decision making than their undergraduate counterparts," he offers provocatively that evangelical seminaries may be hampering the development of their students in these areas by their quest to "effectively transmit orthodoxy" among other student learning goals.

There is more research that must be done with seminary students to be even cautiously definitive in describing a typical epistemological development for this population. There are, though, some solidifying concerns that this first research study raises. The Perry Scheme positions measured by the MID are positive indications for intellectual and ethical maturity. The fact that this sample did not show further development past what is typical for a college graduate with the same evangelical commitments should cause us to question the effectiveness of the evangelical seminary experience to 'nudge' students toward more mature thinking.[7]

The second research question queries whether there is any variance in progression on the Perry Scheme between the two institutional types, denominational and inter/multidenominational. There is a fairly noticeable difference in the means for the two types. The mean for denominational seminarians is 3.42 while the mean for inter/multidenominational seminarians is 3.07. This is the equivalent of one "step" on the categorical scoring. This is supported by the difference in modes as well. The mode for

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[7]Robert J. Kloss, "A Nudge Is Best," *College Teaching* 42, no. 4 (Fall 1994): 151-58.

denominational seminarians according to the categorical scoring is 334 which is dominant position 3 opening to position 4, while the mode for inter/multidenominational seminarians is 333 which is stable position 3. This suggests that attendance at a denominational school may be associated with a slightly higher progression of epistemological development according to the Perry Scheme and subject to the limitations of generalization of this study.

William Moore provided a summary of cues present in the scored interviews (see appendix 9). Below are tables with sample statements for these cues organized into tables by dominant positions. Since there were no dominant position 2 ratings, the tables will begin with dominant 3 position ratings. These quotes associated with primary cues for epistemological position will provide the primary answer to the third research question which is: How do evangelical seminarians describe the seminary experience in relationship to their own development?
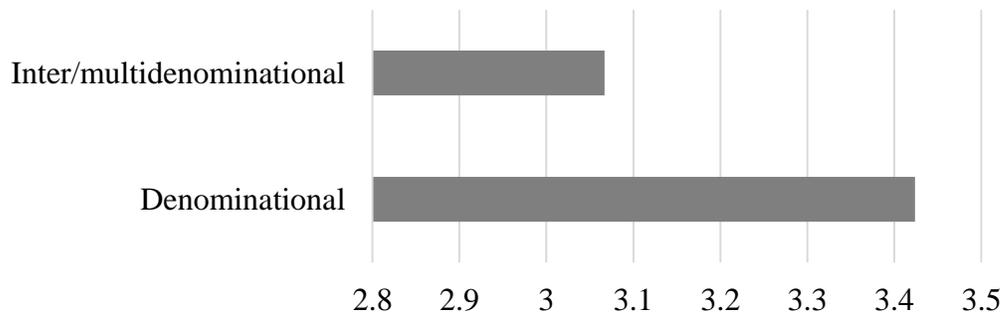


Figure 15. Mean scores by institutional type

Table 6. Position 3 statements and cues

| Position | Sample statement | Primary Cue |
|---|---|---|
| 3 | Justin: I think that's just something that, when you learn by yourself, you don't have a chance to do that; it's all just through your own perspective and you read into things at times . . . but having all these different professors [and] having all these different peers kind of challenge you and push you to the limit and maybe change your perspective on certain things . . . I think that is an important part of growing, spiritually and also mentally as well. | Opening to multiplicity (multiple perspectives) |
| 3 | Daniel: it was really dependent on the kind of professor that I had. I'm not someone who really enjoys studying that much; I mean, I can do it and there are certain topics that I like more than others . . . but when I was first starting out with the Greek Exegesis classes, I had a great professor who was very unique in his teaching style. He was very, very lively, and that really helped me engage with the class . . . and also, he had a lot of in-class assignments where he would have us work on the different things that we were discussing, and a lot of times they would kind of be out of the blue; we wouldn't expect it, and then he'd be like, all right, here's an assignment, you guys have 15 minutes to figure it out . . . and so, that was both challenging, but also really rewarding. He definitely pushed us to do a lot of the work on our own before consulting with outside resources, and I found that to be very, very helpful for me . . . his lectures were great, and I just loved the way that he engaged with the students and how he presented the material. | Learning a function of teacher/ student relationships |
| 3 | Nick: I feel equipped to do the studies and the work that I have to do to do my sermons and everything, but there are certain things that seminary can't do, like teach you how to empathize and teach you how to understand the heart of your sheep, so that's something I'm learning. | Student responsibility = working hard and/or learning skills |
| 3 | Aaron: I think that you need good opportunities for interaction with both the professor and amongst students; you need to be able to test those theories out, you need to be able to talk about them, you need to be able to find those holes that I previously mentioned, and see where you may be getting it, but not all of the way | Discussion endorsed (peers provide diversity of opinions) |
| 3 | Kevin: I just came to the conclusion that the more you learn at seminary, the more you learn that you don't know anything, and so I think my seminary education has really taught me that the Body of Christ is so big and so vast that it is our job to have these conversations about theology, and about who God is, who Christ is, who the Holy Spirit is, what is the church's role, and to keep digging and keep seeking because God is just so big and so vast in His wisdom and knowledge and love. | Quantity/ qualifiers; lots of details |
| 3 | Brian: seminary has really given me a framework to really know practical ways to reach out to people, especially in the context [of] New England, where Christianity is changing here, and there's a lot of churches having to change how they do ministry because culture is changing. | Focus on practicality/ relevance |

Table 7 provides sample statements associated with cues for position 4 dominant ratings.

Table 7. Position 4 statements and cues

| Position | Sample statement | Primary cue |
|---|---|---|
| 4 | Andrew: I get people [coming] to me . . . who come to me all the time and . . . you know, a certain few people, they always want to talk about certain issues, theological issues or ethical issues, and things like that . . . and seminary might not have given me the answers to a lot of those questions, per se, but it's really helped . . . it really helped me to learn where to go, how to resource . . . how to look up my resources, and just how to think critically through the different issues that are brought to me . . . | Focus on ways of thinking—how to think |
| 4 | Allan: . . . not only learning theological knowledge, but having a theological mind, and how to think rightly about God and apply His Word and teach His Word, and to have a good understanding . . . like, one thing I love about [name of seminary] is their emphasis on biblical theology as well as systematic theology, and so I think just learning how to think theologically is so important, because, you know, when you're in a pastoral context, and you're providing pastoral care or you're teaching or you're just having a conversation with someone about God, you get thrown a lot of questions, or you're thrown into a lot of situations that . . . you haven't read a book on yet or you haven't heard a lecture on, but you can navigate those situations because, you know, your mind has been trained and your heart's been trained on how to think rightly about God and apply His Word, and so I think that's what is so helpful about seminary . . . | "New Truth" rules (absolutes within multiplicity) |
| 4 | Matthew D.: He makes you do things that you probably wouldn't do otherwise . . . like, so, we had to do a textual criticism assignment and two full lexical studies, and then diagramming . . . and [he] just really gets you into the Hebrew, which . . . to me, those . . . I think those have probably been the most profitable classes | Teacher a facilitator/ guide (source of way/s to think) |
| 4 | Steele: I knew that I needed to learn more about how to handle scripture well, how to teach it, interpret it, all those things, and I just kind of knew right then that seminary was the next step. | Student more active, taking more responsibility for learning |
| 4 | Mickey: a person that is more confident in their own perspectives; maybe they gain new perspectives while they're at school, and that's great, but they're more confident about their own beliefs while being able to more graciously interact with other beliefs different from theirs . . . to do so firmly, but, you know, don't deviate from what you're saying, but . . . so, do it with conviction, but also with more empathy, more understanding, and more rigorous interaction with other people, because a lot of times when people argue or disagree, they're kind of talking past each other. | Comfort with multiplicity, connections across disciplines |

Table 8 provides sample statements associated with cues for position 5 dominant ratings.

Table 8. Position 5 statements and cues

| Position | Sample statement | Primary cue |
|---|---|---|
| 5 | Nate: I think what I've done is to do some additional research through the library, talking with those classmates and neighbors around me, bouncing them off of men that I respect that are pastors, and . . . if there's an idea that's foreign to me [or] that's different, I'll take some time [because] I want to evaluate that. I'm not sure that any single one has the same shape or form, but I want to . . . I always want to take my view and read the best arguments against it, and then take the other view and read or listen to, you know, the best arguments for it, and then also the arguments against it, and ultimately, if one view encaptures [sic] my estimation [and is] a better way of putting together the entire scope of the Scriptures, then I have no problem abandoning what I thought beforehand and joining the dark side . . . or light side, I suppose. | Strong sense of self-as-agent in own learning |
| 5 | Nate: [Name of a professor] in a systematic two class taught every perspective and convinced me of pretty much all of them as he taught them on origins of the earth and then would also deconstruct them, and I think me watching his method of "we don't have to hide from actual arguments" . . . there's no reason to throw . . . like, name-calling is not helpful in discussion, and I think I've moved from outright rejecting positions to being willing to take a look at them and trying to understand why the people who hold them hold them and what benefit it adds to them. | Endorses seminar, argument, discussion of ideas |

**Trentham's Epistemological Priorities and Competencies**

Following Trentham's initial study and then the antecedent studies of Long, Cannon, and Sanchez, the interviews of the thirty seminary graduates were analyzed for evidence of the epistemological priorities and competencies developed by Dr. Trentham in his PhD dissertation. These categories are themselves influenced by Bloom's taxonomy. This data provides many avenues of establishing relationships, both of similarity and contrast. Perhaps more so than the CSID ratings, this analysis can offer rich and textured insight into the first and third research questions. While this data is certainly complementary to the MID ratings returned by the CSID, there is a clear

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differentiation between the two. For a comparison of the MID scores for participants along with the number of priorities and competencies observed for each participant see appendix 11. The relationship between the two was probed using the Pearson correlation coefficient. The coefficient between the two variables is 0.311607 which is indicative of a weak direct correlation. This again suggests that the epistemological growth of seminarians may be happening largely outside of the streams identified in the MID.

**Biblically-founded Presuppositions
for Knowledge and Development**

This first of three categories recognizes presuppositions in students that acknowledge God as metaphysically ultimate and the wrestling by students with the relationship that exists between faith and rationality. The two commitments for this category are offered separately below and include sample statements from research participants.

**God and revelation.** This first epistemological priority was described by Trentham as "a recognition of the God of the Bible as metaphysically ultimate, and of revelation as the source and most basic component for knowledge and development."[8] He identified this priority in 9 students in his study.[9] In following studies, Long identified it in 11 students, Cannon identified it in 7 students, and Sanchez identified it in the largest number of students with 15.[10]

In this study of seminarians it was identified in a total of 20 interviews. This number was determined after a number of exchanges between me and John David Trentham. What we began to notice is that seminarians spoke in oblique terms about their

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[8]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 170.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development," 94; Cannon, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 85; Sanchez, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 77.

commitments to God as metaphysically ultimate and Scripture as our most basic source

for knowledge. We speculate that these commitments are such an assumption in the

environment of an evangelical seminary that seminarians are more attuned to think of

Scripture as an authoritative source and less in epistemological terms, and that

seminarians are experiencing seminary education as more of a training ground than a

context for intellectual inquiry. Additionally, taking these suggestions into mind, perhaps

the interview protocol would need to be modified in order to draw out more reflective

epistemological statements about God and Scripture.

Tom provides an example of the way the metaphysical ultimacy of God and his

revelation (in this case in the person of Jesus and in his resurrection) is an assumption and

a ministry "tool" in the bag of the seminarian as he seeks to minister to others (in this

case undergraduates).

> I think . . . you know, it was a really . . . the core of everything with those
> undergrads has been the hope of the resurrection. The resurrection seals our ultimate
> certainty. Like, we know that we triumph over this life in the end. We know it,
> because Jesus already did it . . . that doesn't mean it is gonna be easy but . . . so,
> there's all kinds of things along the way that we just don't know how they're gonna
> pan out, but we can press on with this certainty that, like, Christ is risen, right now .
> . . and so, kind of trying to help them shift their perspective . . . because, you know,
> really, when most of them are talking about uncertainty, they're really talking about
> the next five years . . . and, you know, the next five years are important, super-
> important, but let's keep them in perspective within this certainty that God has a
> place for you [and] He's taking you there; He delivered us His Son to get you there.
> You know, if you've got the end in sight, I think that can give us some assurance
> that He's got the steps along the way.

Seminarians also spoke of how God and his Word had provided the anchor and

guide to their lives, especially during times of uncertainty. Below Aaron describes how

his relationship with God and his reliance on Scripture provided direction when dealing

with periods of doubt.

> Well, I'm a doer by nature; I can keep myself complacent as long as I've got a task
> in front of me, and so there . . . there were some periods where all I could do was
> simply keep working, whether it was at school or my job, as long as I was doing
> [then] I didn't really think about it as much, but we . . . also, we prayed often. We
> prayed frequently and often, and I always had to go back to that section in Matthew;
> you know, consider the lilies of the field, they neither toil nor spend, yet Solomon in
> all his glory was not adorned as one of these . . . it was always a good kick in the

pants to read that and say, all right, God, You said Your Word is true [and] You said it accomplished what You set out, I'm supposed to believe this [and] I don't right now . . . and it was okay, and then we would go about things, and then the next day I would have to go back and read it again and say, okay, God, I still don't feel this, but Your Word is true [and] we can get through . . . and it was just a constant . . . I won't necessarily say that I was good at getting rid of the doubts, but I was getting better and better at saying, you know, doubt or no doubt, life is going to go on [and] things are gonna progress, and it does no good to dwell; dwelling on this is what will get you in trouble, so just pick yourself up and keep going in some way, and that's kind of . . . there [were] some points [where] that [was] all I could do.

Aaron's struggle to have faith was in regular interaction with his core commitments about who God is and how we know him and his will.

**Faith and rationality.** The second priority was one of the more difficult to identify. Trentham describes it as "a clear articulation of the relationship between faith and rationality."[11] Of all the questions when finalizing which priorities were present in particular interviews, this one occasioned the most discussion. Oftentimes it seemed that students had the idea that their faith had been unexamined before and now they were coming to terms with holding it in the tension of counterclaims against it and also from differing perspectives among their own peers and professors, but this was not a clear understanding of the relationship between faith and rationality.

In his study, Trentham identified 6 interviews with this priority.[12] Long identified only 3 in his study, Cannon like Trentham identified 6, and Sanchez like Long identified 3.[13] In this current study, 9 seminarians gave either clear indications of this priority in their interview *or* there were quotes that could be reasonably construed to indicate an apprehension of the tension and relationship between rationality and faith. So, even though this study found the most occurrences, any comparisons must be tempered by the use of an expanded criteria for identification that I justified to Trentham. His

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[11]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 171.

[12]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 171.

[13]Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development," 94; Cannon, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 87; Sanchez, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 78.

overall appraisal of the seminarians' interviews for the presence of a clear articulation of the relationship between faith and rationality was, "It seems these students are primarily hitting on the nature of knowledge as being experiential and impacting sanctification—but I'm not seeing the faith/rationality theme." This is keeping with the general tenor of utilitarianism that Trentham noted about the interviews as a whole, that knowledge was something to be used for an end, but that it was not an end in itself.

Steele gives one of the most explicit descriptions of how he grew experientially in his understanding of the relationship between faith and rationality and what that looks like for him in the seminary environment.

> So, I mean, for me, it was trying to put together my own convictions while at the same time hearing what professors are saying and then also talking with classmates was big and kind of their way of processing and thinking through things, and then I think [that] just as I grew in my knowledge of scripture and how to kind of form an argument and where it leads I feel like I kind of was able to get a lot more of my own inclusions . . . here, mostly, I mean, in the last year and a half to now of seminary, [I'm] kind of saying, okay, this is where I land on these issues and it was . . . I mean, it was more of just kind of a fuller . . . learning from every area, reading slowly, slowly thinking through it . . . and then when hearing a professor I didn't necessarily agree with, trying to see where he's coming from and then, I mean, think through it very, very critically . . . how does this accord with what I've been taught in other classes? Especially if professors disagree, which one do I think is closer to what scripture teaches? There hasn't really been a ton of times in class where I've had a professor just say something [that] I've just been, like, totally opposed to . . . it's always been kind of, like, yeah, I can see how his line of reasoning got him there, you know, to that point, [but I] don't necessarily know that I'm there, though it was very . . . I mean, it's very much been a productive learning environment in that sense and not as much of saying something I just flat-out disagree with or whatever .

The fact that Steele describes this as it lived out rather than in a theoretical or abstract manner is consistent with the overall way seminary students described their cognitive growth. It was for the most part all how it was lived out in the classroom, in the church, and in the world.  As an example of a student who hinted at an understanding of the relationship between faith and rationality albeit not directly stated, consider this quote from Alex Y. concerning how seminary changed his view about the use of Scripture in evaluating the ideas of others.

So, I'd say that maybe, in terms of thought-life, that's encouraged me to kind of

want to try to do the same to be, you know, open to hear from others and to do so humbly and receptively and also critically as well. I think . . . I think one of the big ways that has . . . that seminary has helped shaped me is seeing the narrative of the Bible and thinking about the context of all the teaching, and so seeing it as a cohesive story and not just necessarily, like, you know, doctrines . . . like, the Bible's not a systematic textbook, but it teaches through stories and songs and other ways as well . . . so, it's been helpful. Those are a few things that come to mind.

What I saw here in Alex's quote was an indication of his wrestling with the idea of "proof" from the Bible and that he has now come to realize that it does not all look like proof texts and established doctrines, but it can also look like the thrust of the metanarrative and artistic appeals to the emotions, that these were in a sense foundations of knowledge as well.

## Metacognition, Critical Reflection, and Contextualistic Orientation

The second of the Trentham categories broadly deals with how learners reflectively understand thinking, learning, and knowledge. Trentham identified the four priorities and competencies in this category as "the primary elements of cognitive maturation as put forth prominently by Perry in his original study and later publications."[14]

**Forms of thinking.** This first priority/competency is a student's preference for the types of thinking that are characterized at the higher-levels of Bloom's taxonomy. Trentham consulted the now revised taxonomy of learning objectives in order to be able to sort and categorize preferences for some of the more important and persistent yields of the educational process.[15] The three highest-levels are Analyze, Evaluate, and Create.[16] Trentham identified the presence of at least one of the three highest levels of Bloom's

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[14]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates,"172.

[15]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates,"172.

[16]See David R. Krathwohl, "A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy: An Overview," *Theory into Practice* 41 (2002): 212-18.

taxonomy in 14 interview transcripts.[17] Long found it in even more with a total of 19, Cannon with 18, and Sanchez found it in the largest number with 21.[18] In this study, the total number of occurrences is 17, fewer than the three replication studies, but more than in the original study by Trentham. This seemed to be an area of largely present development in the pre-ministry undergraduates, and it could be speculated that those who had these preferences in undergraduate then kept them into the graduate context, while those that did not already have these priorities in college did not develop them later when in the seminary context. Below are sample statements from seminarians for each of these three higher-level forms of thinking.

Jay explains below his views on the ideal class. Instead of being exhaustive in its coverage, he prefers a class that is limited in what it covers thereby giving the student the opportunity to *analyze* the material and then produce a synthesis of what he has learned.

> And so, the more you try to cover, it's likely that you'll understand less, and so I think a really effective class would be specific and at the beginning would give, like, a brief overview of all the topics they want to discuss in the class, which should only really be a few, and then as a class you dig in deep to a few subjects and also provide opportunities for the students to explore areas that they're more interested in with small papers or, like, short presentations.

Craig appreciates times when being exposed to other points of view then push him to *evaluate* and even modify his own perspectives.

> Let's say I have an idea of, you know, Creation; you know, like, of the framework theory or something, or I come up with my own theory, and I say, why didn't anybody ever think about this idea? And then I'm so focused on the seed of an idea that I never really allow anybody to tell me otherwise, and so I think critical thinking is examining your ideas to see where they can grow and also be willing to change and take a different route . . . you know, I think that the humility of being told you're wrong or redirecting your argument is, I think, a bedrock of critical thinking, so you're not just, like . . . you don't just get an idea and run with it,

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[17]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates,"172.

[18]Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development," 95; Cannon, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 90; Sanchez, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 79.

regardless of what other people tell you.

Casey in the statement reproduced below expresses his desire that assignments in seminary allow for and even motivate students to *creatively* repurpose assigned materials to fit new contexts and situations.

> Assignments that can actually be used in future ministry. For instance, you know, anytime we're doing a hermeneutical paper on, you know, a passage of scripture, I think it makes sense to then have to turn that into a sermon or a curriculum of Bible studies or if you're in class, you know, coming up with programming for, you know, adult learners or children's ministry or something that you can actually implement or apply or something, you know, counseling sessions, something like that, for the future, that you can actually use when you go into ministry.

Brian provides an example of his seminary experience that allowed him to *creatively* contextualize what he was learning in the classroom to his ministry environment.

> I think seminary has really given me a framework to really know practical ways to reach out to people, especially, I mean, in the context [of], like, New England, where, I mean, Christianity is changing here, and there's a lot of . . . like, a lot of churches are having to change how they do ministry because culture is changing. So, these are conversations we have here at the seminary . . . like, I'm taking a church revitalization class right now, and in this class, we're asking these questions, like, [of] how to bring adaptive change to churches so that they can stay open [and] that they can stay doing ministry . . . and that's something I'm really taking away, is how to be just intentional and asking these questions about our changing communities: how can the church reach and adapt to the changing culture, and how can we still bring our changing message of the Gospel to these places to reach them? So, I think seminary has just taught me to be more intentional with people and reaching them where they are. It's definitely given me some unique ways to explain things to people.

**Wisdom-oriented modes of thinking.** In this next priority, seminarians demonstrated a preference for thinking that modeled wisdom, or living successfully in the world as God has ordered it. Trentham had hoped that he would see a correlation in cases of this with the positioning the students received on the MID, but with only 4 identifiable cases in his study he did not see any correlation.[19] Long had a slightly higher occurrence

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[19]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates,"174. Also see appendix 11 in this study for the overall weak correlation calculated for the relationship between the MID ratings and the instances of Trentham's epistemological priorities and competencies.

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with 7, Cannon like Trentham had 4, and Sanchez like Long identified 7.[20] While the first

priority in this category saw very similar results between the pre-ministry undergraduates

and the seminarians that is not the case with this wisdom oriented priority. A total of 20

occurrences were identified among the evangelical seminarians. One thing that stood

about the many examples were that they were connected in some way to the life the

seminarian was living outside the seminary, especially in interning or working at a church

or other ministry. It may be that the seminarians are increasingly trying to live out in the

"real world" what they are learning in the classroom and this is then creating a deeper

appreciation for wisdom or the skill to live rightly in the world that God has created and

ordered.

Jamin, for instance, credited difficult situations in church ministry for his

understanding of how the content of heady theology classes also had real practical

implications. This ability to connect the theoretical and practical in a cohesive and

productive way points to wise application of knowledge. He tells how this one particular

situation he experienced his appreciation of doctrine.

> I think the [deepest] way it affected my classroom experience, like I said, is it really . . . it sobers you up. It changes the kind of questions you're looking to [have] answered and the kind of questions you're asking. Interestingly, you know, I wouldn't say . . . you might think, oh, well, you must just have a bunch of practical questions to bring to class, and you're no longer interested in the theoretical. I would say sort of. It's not that it made me always want to bring questions and ask questions and think about processing the answers to only, you know, who you keep from the Lord's table and questions like that, but it made . . . it made my thinking in class much more practical, in how do I apply this stuff. Deeper questions of . . . I mean, like, when you're studying the atonement in one of your systematic classes, and I'm [in] the midst of dealing with someone who's looking for forgiveness after sexually abusing his daughter, all of a sudden, there . . . that becomes eminently practical.

Some seminarians that we considered, though, were determined to be more

concerned with skills or as Trentham commented on one "a preference for tools rather

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[20]Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development," 98; Cannon, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 93; Sanchez, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 81.

than a preference for wisdom than actual wisdom." One clear example of this comes from Jonathan S. who said in his interview, "I kind of wish seminaries would market themselves more as, like, almost technical schools for certain things…and realizing that there's so much more that needs to happen in the church."

**Criteria for assessing beliefs and values.** The intellectual and cultural environment of theological seminaries pushes students to assess both the ideas they have brought with them and at the same time new ideas held by faculty and peers. Trentham described this competency as "a reflective criteria of assessing one's own beliefs and values, as well as divergent beliefs and values."[21] He found only 4 occurrences of this competency in his sample group.[22] Long had a slightly higher number with 6, and Cannon and Sanchez each had only 2 in their respective studies.[23] The seminarians had more examples of this with a total of 14. However, this was a category that really stretched John David Trentham and me in the analysis. Oftentimes we had to almost "sniff" out the criteria because it was either in a very early stage, what Trentham called a "proto-criteria" or it was buried in assumptions. As an example, we negotiated the presence of this competency in the interview with Josh G. who spoke of a "cone of certainty" metaphor that he used to weigh alternate views. Trentham responded to my inclusion of him this way.

> Again, I see his recognition of the need to be reflective and critical, but not a spelled-out criteria for assessing his own beliefs/values. This may be an important theme. Perhaps evangelical seminarians don't generally develop or nurture a robust reflective criteria for assessing their own beliefs and values due to the fact that they choose to attend an institution on the basis of that institution's faculty and students being theologically likeminded.

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[21]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates,"175.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development," 99; Cannon, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 95; Sanchez, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 82.

I tend to agree with him—that this may have been in part influenced by the fact that these seminarians were attending institutions that they chose for the alignment they had with their beliefs.

Even though many did find that alignment at their school, students like Kevin spoke of the way that seminary caused them to reflect more deeply on how they have formed and justified those beliefs.

> I would say when I came into seminary, I had a lot of things that I thought I believed, but it was stuff that was given to me as a child from my parents, which I'm so incredibly thankful for, but coming through seminary, it's really taught me to ask questions and to seek and to figure out what I really believe, and so, coming out of seminary, I feel stronger in my beliefs and stronger in things that . . . being comfortable to say, "I don't know about that" or "I'm unsure about this issue" or, like, "I don't really have that part figured out" and being okay with saying that. I wouldn't have been okay to say that when I came into seminary, because I'd have been . . . I mean, yeah, when I was coming into seminary, because I'd have been worried that someone would have been, like, oh, well, you're not a Christian then, because you don't have that figured out.

Nate, on the other hand, provides a more "worked out" criteria for evaluating his new competing ideas and beliefs. We can notice some of the other competencies and priorities at play in this description as well.

> If there's an idea that's foreign to me [or] that's different, I'll take some time [because] I want to evaluate that. I'm not sure that any single one has the same shape or form, but I want to . . . I always want to take my view and read the best arguments against it, and then take the other view and read or listen to, you know, the best arguments for it, and then also the arguments against it, and ultimately, if one view encaptures [sic] my estimation [and is] a better way of putting together the entire scope of the Scriptures, then I have no problem abandoning what I thought beforehand and joining the dark side . . . or light side, I suppose .

**Social-environmental influences.** Trentham described this competency as "a recognition of social-environmental influences on one's learning and maturation."[24] He identified it in 3 of the participants in his sample.[25] Two of the following researchers had a sizeable amount of additional occurrences with 11 in Long's study and 13 in Sanchez's

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[24]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates,"175.

[25]Ibid.

study, while Cannon had a number similar to Trentham with 5.[26] In this sample of

evangelical seminarians a total of 21 students gave an indication of this priority in the

interview.

In this competency, students are aware of the way their environment is

affecting how they make intellectual discoveries and ethical commitments. Seminarians

with this competency demonstrated a capacity to articulate how the surroundings of the

seminary are applying force on their own change. Mickey described the changes he had

seen in himself since the beginning of seminary. Trentham noted on this quote that it

referenced both the intellectual and the ethical development of the student.

> It's taught me to be more okay with disagreement, and to be more generous towards
> others who disagree with me when ministering to them . . . realizing that not
> everyone has the same education I do [and] realizing that not everyone comes from
> the same background I do. I mean, even in the seminary community, even though
> we agree on a great number of things, especially at [name of seminary], there's still
> a great many things that we disagree on, and interacting with people with different
> opinions has helped me to appreciate . . . you know, to appreciate more diversity I
> see in the Body of Christ, and I think it's helped me to be able to just empathize
> with people more who think differently than me, and it makes it easier to minister to
> them . . . not feeling like I have to correct everything that someone believes, but
> simply just trying to minister the Gospel to them and, you know, help them to see
> God more clearly, just like others have done for me .

**Personal Responsibility for Knowledge—
Within Community**

The last of the three categories has four priorities and competencies that center

upon the student having made responsible choices for learning in community and as an

individual in having commitments with awareness of the difference in his community.

**Interdependence and reciprocity.** Trentham describes this first priority as "a

pursuit of personal development that results from mutual interdependence and reciprocity

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[26]Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development," 100; Cannon, "Epistemological
Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 97; Sanchez, "Epistemological Development in Pre-
Ministry Undergraduates," 83.

in one's relationships with authority figures and peers."[27] He discovered an indication of interdependence and reciprocity in a total of 5 interviews.[28] Following him, Long found 8 examples, Cannon also found 8, and Sanchez found one less with 7 total participants.[29] The seminarians showed this priority in their interviews at about the same frequency as the undergraduates with a total of 9.

In this priority, seminarians spoke of their pursuit of relationships with faculty, pastors, mentors, and peers. In the best examples, the relationships benefited both parties and spurred both on to greater understanding and empathy. Nick in particular noted how important it was to his growth to have a peer group that was involved in each other's lives.

> I think the thing that stands out most would probably be the quality of peer connections that I had with my group of seminary friends. We pushed one another, academically, so I think we all got more out of [seminary] because of it.

Brian talked fondly about his relationship with the pastor at his church. Since they were co-laborers there was balanced give and take between him and this mentor.

> It's been a really solid relationship. We have met weekly for, like, an hour a week, just talking about . . . yeah, talking about the business stuff and then how you [are] doing and what events are coming up next, so there's that part, but there's also just the discipleship part . . . like, really intentionally, like, asking me about my seminary experience, and what the Lord's preparing me to do, and how best to come alongside me, and there [have] been times where it's, like, intentional prayer for each other, times with, like, mutual encouragement too, and there's, like, you know . . . he was going through kind of a rough situation at the church and bouncing ideas off of me, so I felt like I was, like, helping him too; it was like this mutual mentoring relationship as well as . . . I mean, I would get the opportunity to preach and then we would kind of sit down and go over that sermon and then he would help me to grow in that sense. So, it's been a really good relationship; one of, like, deep mutual respect. I think he's definitely a very different type of pastor than I [am], so I've learned a lot from him. It's been great to . . . I mean, it's caused me to, like, be humbled, too . . . and so those are some certain times that I wouldn't have done . . . some certain things that he did, I would do a different way, but I've learned a lot

[27]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates,"177.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development," 100; Cannon, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 100; Sanchez, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 84.

from him . . . and, yeah, I would say this church is probably the first church I've felt, like, at home ever in my life, so it's been really a great opportunity to do ministry there.

Many seminarians spoke of the benefits they received from a mentor-protégé relationship during the seminary experience. Unless there was an indication of some level of reciprocity or interdependence these were excluded from the totals for this priority. It is important, though, to note this dynamic in the life of seminarians since it largely, in the interviews, overshadowed the times when seminarians reflected on their own contributions to the learning and maturing process either among peers or with authorities, i.e., professors and pastors. This result may in part be laid at my feet as the interviewer and the designer of the protocol. Mentoring was an influence that I specifically probed for, while I did not as intentionally seek out reflections on interdependent relationships, so when they occurred it was almost as a byproduct of the mentoring line of inquiry. The quote from Casey given below is indicative of the way seminarians appreciated the benefits for ministry training and the pastoral care that they received in the mentor-protégé relationship.

> I mean . . . he's been a pastor for 40 . . . over 40 years, and so I can . . . when we meet, I can talk to him about what I'm learning and he can . . . he can show me how he's applying it or, you know, show me what it actually looks like in pastoral ministry, you know, how . . . how did . . . how does my, you know, exegesis of the text help me when I'm visiting, you know, 90-year-old Betty Joe in the hospital and her family's there and she's dying? You know, the mentor can help me with that kind of thing as well as just be somebody who's steady and constant and cares about me and my future in ministry.

**Personal responsibility.** The second competency in this final category was defined by Trentham as "a sense of personal responsibility for gaining, maintaining, and progressing in knowledge."[30] He located this competency in almost half of his interview transcripts for a total of 14.[31] Long found it half as many times with a total of 7, Cannon

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[30]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates,"178.

[31]Ibid.

found it a similar number of times for a total of 13, and Sanchez found it in 8 interviews.[32] Like the first priority on category 3, the frequency for this priority among seminarians is solidly in the same range as the frequencies among the precedent undergraduate studies. For the seminarians there were 13 occurrences.

Seminarians with this priority reflected on how they took ownership of the pursuit of knowledge in seminary. Many of them are driven by the sobering realities of ministry to become better prepared for its rigors. Jonathan S. spoke of why he felt he needed seminary.

> If I'm going to be a teacher and a preacher of God's Word, I need to know how to handle it. It's as simple as that. I just needed more training, and I knew it, and I think 99% of guys need it. I didn't know how to read the Bible well. I had a Bible degree, but I still . . . I needed to learn the languages, and I just . . . I needed an all-around . . . more education if I was going to, you know, have a . . . if I'm going to have a 40-50 year church ministry that's . . . that I want to be really meaningful.

There were times when the student was cognizant of the ways in which ministry experiences while in seminary were pushing them to appreciate and desire the intellectual growth available to them in seminary. Jamin had an especially rigorous experience as a pastor of a church while in seminary. Here he recounts how his pastoral struggles motivated him to grapple with the material he was learning in seminary.

> It really stretched me, humbled me, [and] slowed me down in a lot of good ways. It's . . . seminary has been, in many ways . . . now, most of this was because of ministry, not because of seminary. Seminary's, you know, great; you come, you take classes, it's wonderful, great knowledge. I could . . . if all things were equal and there were no ministry to do, I could just come hang out at seminary and be a happy camper for the rest of my life, but there's a Kingdom to advance and [so] we can't do that, so . . . But having done ministry while I'm doing [seminary] has just really been stretching [and] sobering. You realize how much you don't know. You realize how non-theoretical everything you're doing in class really is, and it just really . . . like I said, I'm a lot more sober than I used to be about ministry.

While many, really most, seminarians had a distinctly utilitarian bent to their desire to gain and maintain knowledge, i.e. to be equipped and trained for ministry, Steele

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[32]Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development," 101; Cannon, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 102; Sanchez, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 84.

had a personal responsibility that landed closer to the heart of the priority. Below he speaks about how seminary has shaped his understanding of the need to always be seeking to grow intellectually.

> I know being at [name of school] has definitely shown me the value of the fact that growing in knowledge and learning that never stops, it doesn't stop with graduation, and so, you know, whatever ministry it is [that] I go into, there's a necessity to always be reading, always be growing in my knowledge of . . . and, obviously, love for the Lord, but . . . biggest . . . I mean, just stimulating my mind.

Others in the sample for this study demonstrated what Trentham began to call proto-versions of this competency and others as we analyzed the transcripts. These were students who are starting to "find their way" to a position. For instance, Paul spoke about he was forming better study and writing habits, "pushing through those procrastinating kind of impulses and being okay [with] having imperfect thoughts on the page," in order to better succeed in seminary. He is showing personal responsibility to pursue good learning habits, but is still on the verge of demonstrating the fuller responsibility to pursue and maintain knowledge for its own sake.

**Active and engaged learning.** The third epistemological priority in this last category is described clearly and simply as "a preference for active involvement in the teaching and learning process."[33] Trentham found this priority at a fairly high rate with a total of 19 occurrences.[34] Long identified it even more often with a total of 22 occurrences, Cannon with a smaller number of 11, and Sanchez with an even half of his study at 15.[35] Surprisingly, the positive indications of this priority were found at the lowest frequency among the seminarians with only 9 positive occasions discovered in the interview transcripts. Variances like this are significant and should occasion additional

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[33]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates,"179.

[34]Ibid., 239.

[35]Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development," 102; Cannon, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 104; Sanchez, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 85.

study. A longitudinal study of students entering and leaving seminary using only the lens of Trentham's epistemological priorities and competencies could add more insight on whether only students with this preference coming into seminary leave with this priority.

Kevin recounted one of the clearest instances of a preference for an active and engaged learning environment. His story may be harrowing to some students, but he saw it as a way to push him to deeper ownership and responsibility in the classroom learning process.

> A good seminary course would be quality of books, [and] demanding us to actually do the work and to think about the work . . . and I think that stems from discussion and expecting, like, the seminarians to do what they're supposed to do. There was . . . I had a teacher in my Mark Exegesis class who told us . . . he was like, you don't have to do the translation, but I'm gonna call on you, and if you, you know, like . . . if like, you didn't do the translation, you and I are now going to work through it, and we're gonna translate it together, but you're gonna be embarrassed, so you might want to do the work before you come, and it was true . . . you know, there [were] times when I didn't do . . . I, like, rolled the dice and I didn't do the work, and he called on me, and I was like, here we go . . . but it was great because he wasn't shaming us; he was saying, like, you and I will work through it right there in class, but it'll take longer, and so we might not get all done that, like, we want to get done, and you might be a little embarrassed . . . and so, like, it caused us to keep translating every day, and that was really fun, you know . . . that really helped me to get a lot out of the text .

I probed the experiences students had in distance course and in classroom courses in a number of interviews. Allan was one who demonstrated the preference for active learning when making his comparisons.

> Alex: Yes, yes. Yeah, so, I did do a lot of online . . . because it just helped, you know, as far as scheduling goes, but I certainly do better in a classroom environment.
>
> Interviewer: Why do you think it's better for you?
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> Alex: Many different reasons. I mean, one, I just . . . I enjoy in-class dialogue [and] I enjoy being able to ask the professor questions, and so that's always . . . you know, it's easier to do that, obviously, in a classroom versus through online forums. I also enjoy the student interaction, and then also, just for accountability for me; it's a greater temptation, you know, to not put as much work in or to cut corners in an online context versus in the classroom, and so, I just, you know . . . it was better for me in that regard as well.

Allan, like others very much appreciated the flexibility and convenience of

being able to take some courses by distance. Again, though, the strong preference is for the engagement of the in person classroom. His preferences, however, do not quite reach a quest for active learning, instead it is more focused on a certain type of environment. So his is an example of one of the reflections that did not quite reach the standards of criteria for this priority, but is showing an opening to the preference for active involvement in learning.

> For the most part, if I'm quite honest, distance courses are terrible, mainly because it's so impersonal, and it . . . they try to deal with that by giving student interactions; here at [name of school], you have to do so many posts on a blog to the professor and so many posts to the students. The problem with that is [that] you don't know how many students are gonna take the class around the same time as you, and so a lot of times, you end up commenting on posts that happened two or three years ago because you have to get those in, and it's just . . . there's just not really any opportunity to interact.

**Convictional commitment.** The final priority that Trentham recognized in certain college students was "a convictional commitment to one's own worldview–maintained with critical awareness of personal contexts, ways of thinking, and challenges brought to bear by alternative worldviews–through testing and discernment."[36] This slightly more involved commitment was identified by Trentham in 5 of his participants.[37] Long noted it in 7 of his interviews and so did Cannon while Sanchez noted it in only 2 of his interviews.[38] For this final competency, it was much more prevalent among the seminarian sample with a total of 15 participants identified. As we worked through these interviews, Trentham speculated that this may be area in which evangelical seminarians "hit their epistemological stride" working through the diversity that exists in both the

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[36]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 179.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development," 103; Cannon, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 106; Sanchez, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 86.

undergraduate and seminary context. Also, this is an area that seminaries—and Christian

colleges and universities—place an emphasis.

As Alex Y. and I talked about his experiences when confronted by new or

different ideas, he first pointed back to his experience at a Christian college as the time in

his life that this happened the most. He goes on, though, to speak about the way he has

navigated the diversity of thoughts presented by fellow believers in the seminary context.

> I would say, you know, that experience in seminary has been one of, when my
> beliefs are confronted, trying to, you know, consider the arguments that are made
> and maybe rethink my own position, but know that, you know, that's not important
> to salvation, having the right doctrine, necessarily, in that we can continue a
> relationship even if . . . even if our views are different, and work together for the
> advance of the Kingdom.

Steele talked about the slow process of sifting through the alternatives and

eventually landing on some personal, core commitments.

> I mean, for me, it was trying to put together my own convictions while at the same
> time hearing what professors are saying and then also talking with classmates was
> big and kind of their way of processing and thinking through things, and then I think
> [that] just as I grew in my knowledge of scripture and how to kind of form an
> argument and where it leads I feel like I kind of was able to get a lot more of my
> own inclusions . . . here, mostly, I mean, in the last year and a half to now of
> seminary, [I'm] kind of saying, okay, this is where I land on these issues and it was .
> . . I mean, it was more of just kind of a fuller . . . learning from every area, reading
> slowly, slowly thinking through it

The overall tenor of the interviews was indicative of a group of people for

whom commitment was second nature or assumed, and what the seminary experience

offered was an opportunity to refine, test, and strengthen their commitments to the Lord,

to ministry and the local church, and to others.

## Recurring Themes

In the foundational study by Trentham, a discussion of major themes followed

the independent analysis according to the epistemological priorities and competencies

developed by him.[39] These themes included the primacy of relationships, mentors,

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[39]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 181-95.

relationship with teachers, purpose of college, impact of college, perspective regarding seminary, and "the bubble" at Christian colleges and universities. Trentham determined these themes "to bear relevance to participants' developmental (generally) and epistemological (specifically) perspectives."[40] In the following studies by Long, Cannon, and Sanchez, all three took the opportunity to address recurring themes in their own interviews. Long and Sanchez both addressed the exact same themes as did Trentham.[41] While Cannon also followed Trentham, he did vary in some ways the themes he probed in his interviews and thus also that he noticed and remarked upon in his analysis. He organized his themes as the primacy of relationships, relationship with professors, relationship with dormitories, exclusivity of Christian campus, purpose of seminary, need for ministry practicality, and the importance of a mentor.[42] He not only noticed some different themes he also elicited for some like the relationships within the dormitory setting. In that way, my analysis will be more like that of Cannon's. I both intentionally probed for some particular themes like the importance of having a mentor as well as noticed developing themes as the interviews progressed, notably the marriage relationship. It should be expected that with a slightly older sample in a progressively, vocationally narrowed environment like the seminary that there would be variation in the themes important to participants. Seminarians speaking about their own development often referenced these themes: faculty, mentors, the local church and ministry, marriage, and calling.

**Faculty.** As noted above, preceding researchers noted the critical importance of relationships, including the relationships with faculty. In this study, seminarians were

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[40]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 180.

[41]Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development," 104-15, and Sanchez, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 87-96.

[42]Cannon, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 110-118.

influenced in the largest degree by faculty. This was very apparent in the seminarians' answers to the question "Thinking back through your seminary experience overall (to this point), what would you say most stands out to you?" Faculty was the prominent component of fifteen of the thirty answers to that question. For a general comparison, Trentham noted relationships in general as a theme in nearly three-fourths of his interviews, but, again, that was just in general.[43]

In this analysis, though, it was not only the relationship with a faculty member or faculty members that was the most memorable. Sometimes it was the classroom experience and being able to learn from such esteemed teachers (in the participants' estimation) that had an outsized impact on the student. I have included as being notable any of these recognitions of the importance of faculty.

For some the relationship is definitely primary, at least in terms of what most impacted them in their perspective. For instance, Jamin starts his interview saying, "I think the most meaningful thing to me has been relationships developed with professors." And Jonathan S. makes clear that it was time with faculty outside the structure of the classroom that had the most impact. He said, "The thing that stood out most for me probably was the amount of learning and growth that I received that was actually outside the classroom . . . with faculty that didn't necessarily happen during lecture time."

For others it is the teacher as an expert and the classroom instruction that made the more lasting impact. Matthew D. made this statement about his four favorite professors, "When I think back about my seminary, I think back to those classes with those guys, [that's] what really stands out to me." Even when it is primarily about the classroom experience, students still expressed appreciation for the character and relational qualities in professors. Steele did not develop a close relationship with a professor, but still it was his teachers that most stood out to him. He recalled, "It has not

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[43]Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates," 181.

just been the classes, but the actual men who have been teaching those classes . . . both academically, but also pastorally."

Many students enjoyed the benefit of both excellent classes and relationships with their teachers. This may be an especially common benefit due to the smaller environment of seminaries and seminary classes in contrast to many universities and even colleges. Craig's recollections provide a great example of both the in classroom teaching and also the informal relational dynamics.

> I really enjoyed my professors. That was probably the biggest benefit I had, was just the opportunity to not only learn in the classroom, but just get to know them afterward; I think [that] one of the, you know, biggest benefits of, like, on-campus education is that, you know, I can learn more, and, you know, as I'm growing and learning, I can, you know, feed off of their ideas and get kind of their guidance as I look into different issues.

There was no doubt by the end of the thirty interviews that for these thirty seminarians the greatest impact on their overall seminary experience—in their perspective—was provided by faculty.

**Local church.** The participants in this study, in answers to direct questions and also as expansions of closely related or even tertiary questions, frequently remarked on the importance of being involved in a local church and the impact that it had on their growth during seminary. There was a probe question included as part of the interview protocol that was included on some interviews. The question was "What was your involvement in the local church and how did it affect you?" For many though, this probe was either not used or needed since local church involvement was seen by the participants to be such an integral part of the seminary experience that it came up naturally.

In the few cases where the seminarian did not demonstrate a significant impact of local church involvement it a seminarian who was more directed toward the academic nature of seminary study rather than the practical ministry components. For instance, Alex who came to seminary without a clear affirmation of calling to ministry from a

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church and also saw himself as being weak in areas like preaching. He did, though, appreciate the way his seminary helped "demystify what a call to ministry is" and also gave him opportunities "in an environment that I could do more teaching and more presentations and things like that" that ultimately directed him toward pursing teaching as a calling.

Still for the majority of students, the local church was a place that shaped and refined what they learned in the classroom, helped to discern the calling to vocational ministry, and also provided sustenance and relationships that supported the seminary experience. Kevin who made some significant changes in his church affiliation while in seminary, was one of those who very much appreciated the way in which the laboratory of the church supplemented his seminary education. At one point in the interview, while talking specifically about mentoring, he remarks that the required, mentored field education in a church "was basically like an extra education from the seminary, because I was able to see things that I was learning in seminary actually happening in the church." And Jim in speaking about how well prepared he felt for ministry, particularly in preaching, described the way in which the classroom and church experiences complemented each other.

> I was able to preach in front of, like, a small cohort of guys and get immediate feedback from a pastor as well as them, and, you know, I preached almost every semester, and then [for] the field education, I did some internships at churches where I got to preach and lead liturgy . . . and so, that very practical hands-on experience, I felt, would definitely come in handy and has been [in] preparing me.

The local church was also a place for students to test their gifting and calling and to further refine their life after seminary. Alex spent a large portion of his time in seminary also interning at a church. He points back to this in the way it helped to affirm his calling to vocational ministry.

> I, you know, have felt called to ministry, and so that's why I have come to seminary, and since then, [I] have been working as an intern the last 2 years at a local church, which has been great confirmation, getting to preach about, you know, 9 times a year in those 2 years . . . so, that's been really helpful experience and I've gotten a ton of affirmation from the people in the church and from peers as well [as]

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classmates.

Joshua K. was sent across the country by his church to attend seminary and then expected to return afterwards to serve in a pastoral capacity. This gave him a lot of confidence in his calling and direction.

> I came to seminary kind of knowing where I would end up afterwards. My home church in California sent me out and they're supporting me financially and with prayers as well. So, they kind of affirmed my calling into ministry prior to coming, and so I had discussions with elders and they laid hands on me before I came out into seminary . . . and so, once I was here, I would say, it was . . . it was more geared towards specific areas of ministry . . . and so, after seminary, I would be . . . I will be working with a high school complex, and so a lot of the topics that kind of came up for me began to focus more and more on the issues and the needs, I think, that kind of centered around that age group . . . and I also will be working in [an] immigrant context, and so, Chinese immigrants from China and Taiwan . . . and so, a lot of my training here . . . I took classes that were kind of cross-cultural and how to navigate those types of dynamics within the church.

The intimate connection between seminary and church for the students may be one of the strongest that exists between a professional school and the institution which it serves. Not only does the local church provide a place of practice and training it also provides meaning, support, and guidance for the students and their families. This, though, can have a dark side as well. There were a few students who had very difficult church experiences in seminary and this caused them to have doubts about their calling and also additional stress and strain at seminary. Jay shared this story from his seminary days.

> We joined a church plant that . . . it was with people that we trusted, and because of [the] lack of accountability and just some poor choices, we were really hurt, and so we tried to stay at the plant, but eventually we just felt that it was going nowhere and it was unhealthy, so we left and then a few months later, the whole thing collapsed. It really scarred both of us, but it just made me be antagonistic against anything that they were for . . . and so that made learning at seminary hard and we didn't go to church for like six or eight months and then . . . yeah, so, it was probably just a shaping of seminary, but in a negative way instead of positive.

Jay and his wife did later find a very healthy church home and were able to heal and come to trust the Church again, but the experience at the beginning of seminary did have a significant negative influence over much of his experience. This should be seen as a cautionary tale for those involved in field education placement and other administrative and student services roles to be diligent in examining the churches to

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which students are sent or placed.

        **Marriage.** I noticed this theme early in the interview process and so I even started to probe for it recognizing what an important influence this relationship was for those that were married, or even on the way toward marriage. Seminarians talked about their marriage relationship and the impact it had on their development a total of thirteen times. There were, of course, a number of unmarried participants (although I did not ask this status question in the participation form which is something I would change now). But, there were more students that were married than just the thirteen. I only counted those that gave a clear indication that his wife was a significant influence on how he was processing his experience and even determining the direction of his development. For the great majority, they spoke in glowing terms of the help they received from their wives, from the practical to the intellectual.

        One way in which wives influenced their husbands was as discussion partners. Frankly, I was a little surprised at this because in my experience I have heard more often about husbands not sharing the seminary or ministry experience with their wives and the problems that can cause. However, in this study, I heard often from participants about the ways in which their wives had been a sounding board or a partner. Alex, in responding to my questions about his process for working through ill-structured issues for which there is not a clear and ready path to an answer, said this, "it's going to be my wife that I'll, you know, be talking through different ideas with her." More than the big ideas, it was the nitty gritty of charting out a vocational course that was the center of discussion. Of course, these decisions affected the seminarians' wives, but what came out was how supportive the wives were of the husbands' processes and journeys to find a ministry calling. Mickey and his wife had a number of struggles making the adjustment to seminary life after the move, but in terms of his working through his calling this is how he described his wife's involvement.

She's very supportive in the jobs I've been trying to get and the ministry roles I've been trying to pursue. She's consistently affirmed my call. She actually hasn't really shown much doubt about it at all since I've gotten here, so she's been very helpful in helping me work through the doubts I've had.

Craig's wife was instrumental in pointing him to options other than pastoral ministry that now in hindsight were a better fit for his gifting and temperament. He lamented that for a long period he did not have any outside voices giving him feedback on his calling, including his wife, "[I] was not even listening to my wife . . . you know, I asked her one day . . . so what do you think I should be doing? And she was like, I think you're a good teacher and you're a great writer, so you should be doing that." This helped him to redirect away from a vocation that he felt he was obligated to pursue and toward a career in writing which suits him very well.

Seminarians also praised their wives for the financial support they provided making it possible to afford the cost of seminary. The overall tenor, even when describing difficult circumstances, was appreciation for the partnership their wives provided in pursuing and realizing a ministry calling.

**Calling.** This theme, like those above, came out both in direct questions and also in its relationship to other responses given by the seminary graduates. In fact, it could be said that it was this theme that was at the forefront of the minds of many of the participants as they sought to navigate the transition from seminary to vocational ministry or to some other occupation.

For the large majority of seminarians in this study, the call to ministry was sensed well before arriving at seminary and was in fact the primary push or pull to attend seminary. For most of this group—those that are graduating—while the call to ministry may have been shaped, refined, tested, and even strained during the seminary experience, it did remain and was still strong at the end. In many instances a reciprocity between seminary and calling can be identified such as with Allan. Below he describes why he came to seminary and what seminary did in turn for him.

I think it was just being called by the Lord into pastoral ministry, and so, you know, people affirming that, and feeling called, myself, into that, and being given opportunities to be in vocational ministry even before I started. Seminary, I think, just grew and enlarged a desire in my own heart to be trained in the teaching of God's Word and in theology and in that. So, I think it was just a calling from the Lord into the ministry and wanting to steward that well by being well-trained.

There are, though, a few examples of students that had a very vague call, if any, before seminary and the experience of the Master of Divinity has been a way that their call has been developed and shaped. Brian talks about this in response to a question about how he would say he had grown during seminary.

I don't know if I was really intentionally thinking about my calling in college; I was trying to figure out who I was. So, here at seminary, really . . . I mean, coming in pretty sure that, you know, ministry was the right path where God was leading me, but not really knowing specifics, but I think here, you know, I've been able to really . . . I don't know, discern my calling more intentionally here at seminary and really feel confident in that ministry . . . [that] this is really where the Lord is leading me . . . and, I mean, that came with doing the M.Div. and taking a broad number of classes, but also, like I was saying with practical ministry, I think that's really the place where I've discerned my calling and really felt more confident in where God is leading me in the church and serving others in that context . . . so, I would . . . I would say that that's one thing I've learned and grown in, is my calling.

For a smaller group of students, the call to ministry changed quite a bit during the seminary experience and was now either in doubt or pointed in another direction. This was true of Jim's experience and he commented in one of his final statements, "There's definitely been a shift in what I came into seminary thinking that the Lord would have me do and what I'll be doing as we leave." For Jay the seminary experience had begun to redeem a negative prior church experience so that he could say now that working in a church is a possibility, "I'm just gonna be praying a lot [and] hoping that God will really make an obvious direction to go . . . just talking with different churches and seeing how they can help me and hopefully how I can help them and how we could work together for the good of people of God."

Regardless of whether the seminarian experienced a long-standing and unvarying call or a vague and varying sense of call, all agreed that seminary was a place that should—and in many instances did—help students to discern their calling to ministry. It could be said that along with training, it is this clarifying of call that is seen as

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central to the seminary experience by those in this sample group.

## Evaluation of Research Design

The overall design for this study was well suited for a first foray into the description of epistemological development among evangelical seminarians. Since this population has been largely untouched by this this type of cognitive examination, the qualitative methodology was a good fit and it produced substantial data that can be used to focus and to refine future studies of this population. Below I will first promote the strengths and then take up a critical assessment of the weaknesses of the study that I have now observed after the analysis of the data.

### Strengths

The brief catalog below of the strengths will move from those that are general to qualitative research and then move to the actual specifics of how this study progressed and developed over time.

**Qualitative design.** This study benefitted from a fully qualitative design that employed thirty semi-structured interviews of near an hour. The sample was purposive and designed to represent a very purposeful "slice" of a larger sample. These design elements allowed for "thick" descriptions of the experiences of a tightly grouped selection of seminary students.[44] The interviews provided sufficient data to be validated by William Moore at the Center for the Study of Intellectual Development (CSID) who served as an outside rater providing validity. In addition, the interviews also provided sufficient data for other types of analysis.

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[44]Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 10th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2013), 104.

**Multifaceted analysis.** The interviews for this study were analyzed according to three differing, but complementary, interpretive lenses. The first was the Measure of Intellectual Development (MID) that was performed by William Moore. The second was the independent analysis according to Trentham's epistemological priorities and competencies. And the third was the analysis of recurring themes that I compiled from the transcripts and my experiences as the interviewer. These overlapping perspectives inform each other and shed light on the fuller picture of the development of seminary students during their time of study.

**Form data.** The volume and specificity of the form data collected may be one of the continuing benefits of this study for my own research and the research of others both in the continuing replications of these Perry Scheme studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and others interested in the development of seminarians. For instance the differences noted between denominational and inter/multidenominational perspectives on seminary culture (see figure 11) could be a lead into a further probing of the way seminarians view the culture of seminary and its impact on their experience.

**Weaknesses**

The weaknesses of this study are centered on the novice researcher and the constrained population.

**Critical distance.** Going into the study I assumed that my close familiarity with the population would be an asset. I spoke their language and knew many of their struggles having gone through seminary myself and then spending fifteen years working with seminary students. There is no doubt that my familiarity did help to put the participants at ease. I had no trouble encouraging students to share profound experiences and to engage in honest critique of the seminary experience. On the other hand, during the examination of the transcripts and especially during the intense review with John

David Trentham as we determined the indicators of the presence of epistemological priorities and competencies, I noticed that oftentimes I did not probe as strongly as I should have in retrospect.[45] This was most notable in the areas of epistemological presuppositions and the relationship between faith and rationality. Since I could "fill in the blanks" when a participant talked about his appreciation of the faculty of his school "being biblical" I did not probe deeper to find out exactly what "being biblical" meant, as just an example. Therefore, opportunities to push the seminarians to reflect even deeper on how they view the foundations of knowledge and how it relates to their faith and Christian presuppositions were often missed. Going forward, I recommend that those of us that have a substantial amount of familiarity with our population take a note from James K. A. Smith and "try to make the familiar strange" as he sought to do with the cultural and religious rituals we all inhabit on a regular basis.[46] What this could look like will be a self-interview using the protocol to see how we would answer the questions ourselves and then a review with an eye toward critique to uncover our assumptions. This could help to create the critical distance needed in the participant interviews.

**Homogenous sample.** The population for this study in practice was even more homogenous than originally intended. Not only were the participants from evangelical seminaries, they were largely all from seminaries in a Reformed or Reformed-leaning tradition. The reliance on personal relationships to recruit participants made the population a virtual subset of the expressed population. To better represent evangelical seminarians more attention and effort could have been given to fostering connection with evangelical seminaries outside of the Reformed tradition.

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[45]I do not think, though, that this study suffered from some of the problems associated with "backyard" research as discussed by John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches,* 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2014), 188.

[46]James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 114.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

**Research Purpose Statement**

The intent of this study is to explore the nature of epistemological development in evangelical seminarians across different institutional contexts, using the Perry Scheme as a theoretical lens.

**Research Questions**

The research questions along with sub-questions are given below.

1. What is the nature of epistemological development of evangelical seminarians according to the Perry Scheme?

2. What is the variance, if any, in the epistemological development of evangelical seminarians among those attending evangelical seminaries with various organizational missions?

    a. What is the relationship between attendance at a denominational seminary and progression through the positions of the Perry Scheme?

    b. What is the relationship between attendance at an inter/multidenominational seminary and progression through the positions of the Perry Scheme?

3. How do evangelical seminarians describe the seminary experience in relationship to their own development?

**Research Implications**

The analysis of chapter 4 is complete for this study, but it certainly still leaves plenty to consider for future researchers of seminarians and other groups that experience epistemological development. A study of a new population should in some ways raise more questions than it even answers. Below is a list of implications determined through the analysis of the data produced by this research project. The implications of this

analysis are then discussed over three sub-sections below. In the first section, general observations are made in regards to data that emerged from the completed Thesis Study Participation Forms and the interview data is also included when it is helpful. In the second sub-section the research questions from this study are used to draw out research implications. This is followed by the third sub-section in which the epistemological priorities and competencies developed by Trentham are utilized to produce implications from the interviews.

1. Thesis Participation Form respondents were very likely to belong to a denomination, even though many attended an inter/multidenominational school and not a denominational school.

2. Thesis Participation Form respondents were very likely to subscribe to a confession. This finding is more in alignment with the schools of attendance since all have some commitment to a confession or confessional heritage.

3. More than half of the Thesis Participation Form respondents included distance course-work in their fulfillment of degree requirements.

4. Thesis Participation Form respondents reported the importance of faculty to the seminary experience at the highest rate.

5. Thesis Participation Form respondents reported the importance of supervised field education to the seminary experience at the lowest rate.

6. The participants in this study received scores on the MID that are consistent with the preceding four studies on graduating college students and with college graduates in general.

7. There is a noticeable difference in the MID scores between students for each institutional type. This finding implies that further study is needed to determine why this is so.

8. Evangelical seminarians primarily describe their development in terms of increased knowledge of the Bible, growth in their relationship with God, and acquisition of skills for ministry.

9. Evangelical seminarians exhibit the presence of epistemological priorities and competencies at an elevated rate as compared to evangelical undergraduates for half of the ten priorities and competencies. This demonstrates continued growth during the seminary experience for some elements of epistemological maturity.

10. On the basis of this sample, the variable of MID score and the variable of the number

of epistemological priorities and competencies shows only a weak correlation. This implies that the type of growth experienced by seminarians is largely "out of phase" with that measured by the MID.

**Implications Drawn from Form Data**

*Within this sample of seminarians there is a seemingly high frequency of denominational membership.* While the common perception is that denominational loyalty and identification is waning in America and even in American evangelicalism, the seminarians that responded to the thesis study recruitment had a high incidence of denominational affiliation.[1] Among 59 respondents a total of 53 or 90% answered that they were members of a denomination. This implies that for this sample of schools there is still a higher degree of denominational allegiance and also implies that these schools may want to embrace denominationalism—in healthy ways—instead of obscuring or downplaying denominational connections.

*Within this sample of seminarians there is a seemingly high frequency of confessional subscription.* Respondents indicated subscription to a theological confession almost at the same rate as they were members of a denomination with fifty-two of the 59 respondents. Some may think that one invariably follows the other. However, many people are in a denomination and either do not agree fully with the confessional standard of the denomination or are not even very aware of the confessional standards. Thus, to have almost a one to one ratio here indicates that those seminarians in this sample group are both aware and in agreement with the confessional standards in their denominations. This is good news for the seminaries and for the churches that benefit from theological alignment and unity.

*Distance education comprised a portion of the coursework for more than half of the respondents.* Thirty-one or 53% of the respondents used distance education for at

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[1]A recent example of this outlook can be found in Mullin, Miles S II., "Evangelicalism as Trojan Horse: the Failure of Neo-Evangelical Social Theology and the Decline of Denominationalism," *Criswell Theological Review* 12, no. 1 (September 2014): 49-68.

least a portion of their degree requirements. Nine respondents or fifteen percent used distance for one quarter or more of their degree. Some of the seminaries in this sample have invested in distance education and have made it an attractive option, some have not. Given the desire for many students to have distance as one option among others to use to complete their degree, even though as seen in the interviews many of them prefer to be in-class, seminaries that have not invested in this option may want to rethink that choice. They may want to consider even a partial deployment where some classes are hybridized and a few are offered fully online. This may provide the flexibility and convenience that the average student is looking for in a seminary program. If this research study on seminarians used a sample with students over thirty, I predict that the utilization of distance education would have been even higher.

*Among a number of seminary influences, respondents reported that faculty are the most important to the seminary experience.* The Thesis Research Participation Form included questions about the importance of six common influences to the seminary experience of the respondents. The questions were answered using a Likert scale with 1 being the most important and 5 being the least important. Averaging the fifty-nine responses, the average for importance of professors was the lowest (in other words closest to most important) at 1.75. This appreciation of faculty was reinforced in the results of the interviews as well. This is important because while the students' desire for distance course options (see immediately above) is present, the factor that will likely have the biggest impact on the quality of their seminary experience will be professors and especially relationships with professors.

*Among a number of seminary influences, respondents reported that supervised field education is the least important to the seminary experience.* The average for the responses for the importance of supervised field education is the lowest of the six at 2.92. The question about the importance of local church involvement adds some very crucial context to interpreting this result. Students answered with the second strongest response

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when it came to the importance of the local church with an average of 1.90. So, it could be safe to say that students highly value opportunities to gain experience in the field, but they are not very sure of the value being added to the seminary's oversight and supervision of ministry experience. For most it just seems that the seminary is signing off on what they would already be doing.

This result could be an encouragement for seminaries to identify those things best done in the local church and not duplicate those or even guide them very much, while at the same time identifying those practical ministry things that the seminary does best and focusing attention and time on those things. For instance, visitation of the sick is done best in the context of a local church, while theological discussion groups that invite the community may be done best in a seminary since it is one step removed from the church. A school may seem less threatening to a non-believer than a church.

**Implications from Research Questions**

*The reported scores on the Measure of Intellectual Development (MID) for this sample of graduate-level seminarians are consistent with the typical scores of college graduates in general according to the Center for the Study of Intellectual Development (CSID) and in particular with the samples of the four precedent studies on pre-ministry, graduating college students.* The first research question asks the nature of epistemological development among evangelical seminarians. Since the average MID score for this sample of seminarians fell almost exactly in the middle of the averages for the four precedent studies of pre-ministry undergraduates, it must be said for this sample that the nature of epistemological development was stalled according to the types of development measured by the Perry Scheme and the MID. However, the analysis in chapter 4 included a suggestion by William Moore that for graduate students "as people get older their lived experiences diverge more and more so assessing developmental perspectives gets messier and more complex at the same time." Also, the independent

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analysis identified frequent occurrences of Trentham's epistemological priorities and competencies in the analyzed interviews, at a rate significantly higher than the precedent studies of undergraduates in five of the ten priorities and competencies. For these reasons, it can be implied that the Perry Scheme and the MID should be slightly muted in how much input they provide to the overall description of the nature of epistemological development among evangelical seminarians. The caveat, though, is that on those developmental milestones best measured by the MID, this group of seminarians did not show significant development from what could be expected from a college graduate and why this is so should continue to be a question that is asked and probed in future studies.

*The reported scores analyzed by institutional type, denominational and inter/multidenominational, reveal an average difference equivalent to one-third of a position transition.* The second research questions ask whether there exists a difference in reported epistemological development between the two institutional types represented in this study. While the MID did not uncover significant difference between the college graduates and seminarians, within the sample itself there was a significant, but small, difference between students at denominational schools and inter/multidenominational schools. A number of reasons can be suggested. Perhaps denominational schools are attracting students that enter more epistemologically developed to begin? Perhaps school size had a role to play? The largest school in the study was Southern Seminary a denominational school. Students mentioned how they were able to take different professors within the same disciplines, e.g., Old Testament. This may have helped to increase the diversity of perspective the students were exposed to and subsequently provoked further development. Lastly, students at both denominational schools gave examples in interviews of ways they were encouraged to reflect on epistemology. Perhaps there are curricular and philosophy of education reasons for the small difference? This finding does imply, albeit weakly, that there is a difference in epistemological development between students at denominational schools and those at

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inter/multidenominational schools.

*Regardless of the reported scores, seminarians describe their seminary experience as a time of growth and change.* And they do this primarily in terms of increased knowledge of the Bible, growth in their relationship with God, and acquisition of skills for ministry. The quotes associated with the primary cues provided by William Moore found in chapter 4 are some of the best ways to illustrate this developmental pattern among evangelical seminarians. For instance, the position 4 cue for "New Truth" rules (absolutes in multiplicity) is exemplified by Allan's explanation that in seminary "your mind has been trained and your heart's been trained on how to think rightly about God and apply His Word, and so I think that's what is so helpful about seminary." One more example comes from Nate. He provided a sample statement for the position 5 cue for strong sense of self-as-agent in own learning.

> I always want to take my view and read the best arguments against it, and then take the other view and read or listen to, you know, the best arguments for it, and then also the arguments against it, and ultimately, if one view encaptures [sic] my estimation [and is] a better way of putting together the entire scope of the Scriptures, then I have no problem abandoning what I thought beforehand and joining the dark side . . . or light side, I suppose.

The implication is that development is taking place in the seminary environment, it may just be in terms that must be interpreted through the lens of the philosophical and theological commitments of the students and the seminary.

## Implications from Epistemological Priorities and Competencies

*Evangelical seminarians exhibit elevated frequencies for half of the epistemological priorities and competencies when compared to the precedent undergraduate samples suggesting continued growth.* As mentioned above in reference to the first research question, the MID scores for this sample of seminarians was essentially in the same range as that of precedent samples of evangelical undergraduates and undergraduates in general. The multiple perspectives on epistemological growth are one

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of the strengths of this study. The analysis according to Trentham's epistemological priorities and competencies showed elevated frequencies in five of the priorities and competencies. These are IA "God and revelation," IIB "Wisdom-oriented modes of thinking," IIC "Criteria for assessing beliefs," IID "Recognition of social-environmental influences," and IIID "Convictional commitment." It can be implied, then, that these five are potential areas that seminaries are strong in influencing their students. As provocative as these may be for further study, the four for which seminarians showed no real difference (IB "Faith and rationality," IIA "Forms of thinking," IIIA "Interdependence and reciprocity," and IIIB "Personal responsibility") and IIIC "Active and engaged learning" the one for which seminarians showed retreat, may be of the most immediate concern. If additional study does confirm that evangelical seminarians are indeed making little to no progress in these areas, then it should suggest to seminaries that there may need to be some changes to the seminary experience for students.

*This sample of evangelical seminarians exhibited only a weak positive correlation between the MID rating they received and the number of epistemological priorities and competencies they exhibited.* This should be one of the most intriguing implications for researchers continuing in this vein of study. Why is there a fairly significant delinking between the growth measured by the MID and the growth as measured by Trentham's epistemological priorities and competencies? Is this the Inverse Consistency Principle in action? Are these two measures actually measuring different things, i.e. cognitive and affective epistemology? As I mentioned above, a study entering into a new population is likely to raise far more questions than it answers. I think this is one of the most significant of those questions.

## Research Applications

This qualitative research study explored the nature of epistemological development among a population that was relatively novel for this type of research. The

data was compiled using a semi-structured interview of thirty participants. The nature of epistemological development was investigated in a few different manners. First using the Perry Scheme as a theoretical lens, this study utilized the Measure of Intellectual Development (MID) as performed by William Moore of the Center for the Study of Intellectual Development (CSID) to evaluate the positioning of participants according to the Perry Scheme. Second, this study qualitatively analyzed the interviews for recurring themes. And, third, the epistemological priorities and competencies developed by John David Trentham were used to analyze the interview transcripts.

The relatively novel population for this type of study is evangelical seminarians who recently completed the requirements for the degree Master of Divinity. The sample from this population was collected equally from denominational and inter/multidenominational seminaries accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS). The sample was delimited to male students thirty years of age and younger. The type and method of the research along with the demographics of the population and sample suggest a number of interested constituencies for application of the research findings from this study.

First, seminary students will benefit from this research. The lived experiences of similar students will give them insight into their own development through the seminary experience. Current seminary students can benefit from the identification of the influences that were reported as important to this sample of students. For instance, a new seminary student could be encouraged by this research study to develop a mentoring relationship with a professor since a number of participants spoke of the positive impact a relationship like this had on their development. Or it may encourage another student to prioritize seminar type courses in which discussion is prominent in order to become more epistemologically adept.

Second, future seminary students can benefit from this research. Through the reproduced interviews portions and the analysis, certain qualities of seminaries rose to the

top as being important to the valuation current seminarians gave to their schools. For instance, the fact that faculty was the number one theme among seminary students reflecting on the seminary experience should suggest some prioritization of faculty when seminaries are being compared by prospective students. Also, the fact that so many seminarians wrestled with calling should prepare future seminarians to go through the same and know that it is a normal progression through the experience.

Third, seminary boards, administrators, faculty members, and other members of the continuing seminary community can benefit from this research. We are all committed to providing the best seminary experience possible for our students, within our constraints. Certainly intellectual growth must be accounted as something that we want to see improve and even flourish. My hope is that this study and the continuing research of the seminarian will help our learning communities to adapt and strategize in order to provide the best environment possible for the epistemological growth of the students entrusted to us.

Fourth and final, evangelical churches and denominations (and mainline and Catholic bodies too) should be vitally interested in better understanding what is happening in our "seed beds" that produce the bulk of the vocational leadership for the churches in North America. The churches should be encouraged by the life-giving connection these seminarians have with the local church. There are, though, areas that are clearly places for improvement, at least among those sampled here. Very few students spoke of close, reciprocal and interdependent peer groups. Many have mentors and that is a wonderful resource for them as they "learn the ropes" in a manner of speaking. I think, though, that it could be suggested that a close peer group may be an even more important relational asset for long-term health in ministry. Encouraging the development of these peer groups could be of significant importance to the Church and the health of its leaders. Therefore, it is no overstatement to say that the health of the Church itself may be in part dependent on its investment in the seminary and the future leaders it is educating.

## Research Limitations

This study, while important in its effort to begin sampling a largely overlooked population in assessments of epistemological development, is limited for a number of methodological and pragmatic reasons. Below is a catalogue of the limitations of this research that are known to the researcher.

1. The sample from this study was drawn only from seminaries accredited by the Association of Theological Schools. This sample does not represent seminaries that are accredited by other organizations or that do not hold accreditation.

2. The sample is comprised solely of students receiving a Master of Divinity degree. There are numerous professional and academic advanced degrees offered by seminaries. This study sample does not reflect students pursuing other seminary degrees.

3. The sample is comprised solely of students who are at an evangelical seminary and that agreed that a basic definition of evangelicalism defined themselves. There are numerous other theological commitments among seminaries and students, not to mention other traditions such as Judaism, and this sample is not reflective or generalizable to those.

4. This sample of schools and the participants would largely self-identify as being Reformed in their theology and worldview. This is due my heavy reliance on my relational network to recruit participants. This sample is not reflective of evangelical seminaries and students that would not self-identify with the Reformed theological tradition and worldview.

5. This sample is entirely male, by design, and there very well could be differences in the results of a study of female evangelical Master of Divinity students.

6. As correctly noted in previous studies in this series of assessments, "the conclusions presented in this research study were based primarily on the content analyses performed by William S. Moore, John David Trentham, and myself." And therefore "the findings and conclusions of the study should be considered in light of any possible influence from the subjectivity and biases of each individual. The existence, nature, and extent of any such influence could be exposed and confirmed by additional research."[2]

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[2]Gregory Brock Long, "Evaluating the Epistemological Development of Pre-Ministry Undergraduates at Bible Colleges According to the Perry Scheme" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 136; Christopher Lynn Sanchez, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates Attending Secular Universities" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 113.

**Further Research**

In this final section, taking into account all that has been discovered—and left undiscovered—in this particular study, the researcher will make suggestions as to further avenues of investigation of the phenomenon of seminary education. This section can be very helpful to following researchers. In fact, this very study was in part borne out of the further research suggested by Trentham's study. Further, since there are already students in following cohorts that will be replicating this line of research, this section takes on a heightened importance for the assistance, guidance, and even justification is provides. Below are some examples for further research.

First, a study that measures these same participants according to the Perry Scheme five years into ministry or vocation would provide data to better understand the long-term contributions of a seminary education along with those things that seminary cannot do and should be done through experience.

Second, a study that uses participants from two or more types of professional graduate schools could lead to insight about the effects of each type on epistemological development. What could be especially interesting would be a common undergraduate program that connects all of the participants, for instance a philosophy program from which some matriculate to law school, some to an education program, and some to a theological program.

Third, a study that uses a sample of seminarians that have done seventy-five percent or more that Master of Divinity degree through distance education. Since ATS seminaries offering this professional degree either completely or mostly using distance education is a very recent development it will be very relevant to start making some comparisons in development.

Fourth, since this study delimited the sample to seminarians age thirty or younger, it will be a good extension of this study to delimit a sample to seminarians that are older than thirty and have significant work and life experience before entering

seminary. Especially given the results of the MID analysis, it will be good to test whether age is more of a determiner for epistemological development than is program content and environment.

Fifth, a very robust extension of this line of studies would be accomplished by contacting participants from the preceding studies and then arranging interviews with the participants that did eventually go on to seminary and earn a degree. This would provide some longitudinal data on the effects of seminary on epistemological development. This type of study could especially help in understanding the effects of the seminary experience on the development, or lack of development, of Trentham's epistemological priorities and competencies.

Sixth, the sample for this study was delimited to only seminarians earning the professional Master of Divinity degree. However, many seminaries also offer academic masters degrees. A sample comprised of these seminarians could offer intriguing comparisons in how these two types of degree seekers view seminary and intellectual development.

Seventh, this study was delimited to male seminarians. Studies that have female seminarians as a portion or the entire sample could provide very interesting comparisons in how students of different genders view seminary, ministry, and intellectual community and development.

Eighth, a study with participants from mainline seminaries and Catholic seminaries would expand further this study. If differences are noted, then some insightful comparisons may be possible. Another option would be to include students from graduate theological schools that do not have a vocational ministry focus as part of their reason for existence or mission.

Ninth, a cross-sectional study with participants just beginning seminary and participants that are graduating. This type of analysis could be especially helpful to discovering the seminary experiences that are contributing to the development of the

epistemological priorities and competencies that seminary graduates demonstrated in this study at levels elevated above college graduates.

## Conclusion

At different points in this study, I have posed observations, questions, predictions, and a hypothesis regarding the conclusions that may be drawn at the end of this chapter in this series of Perry Scheme studies of evangelical students. In this concluding section I take from these queries and I offer answers and suggestions from the data and analysis.

Early on in the presentation of the research problem, I noted that there is a lack of Perry Scheme studies involving graduate students. This begs the question whether the Perry Scheme is an appropriate measure of the intellectual development of graduate students in general, and seminary students in particular? A quick assessment of the fact that the seminarians in the sample for this study did not show any increase as a group in MID scores over what can be expected for college graduates and what was seen in the four precedent studies of pre-ministry undergraduates could lead to the answer that it is not an appropriate measure. We expected growth; we did not see growth; therefore the Perry Scheme is not a capable theoretical description for the development of this population and thus the MID is not a good measuring tool. However, with deeper consideration, there are two good reasons to continue to use the Perry Scheme and the MID to study seminarians.

First, the Perry Scheme describes positions that have been observed that are beyond what the typical seminarian demonstrated in this sample, so it is not as if seminarians were out of range for the Perry Scheme. The tested, theoretical range for the Perry Scheme should still encompass the development of seminary students for the intellectual and ethical growth that is described by the scheme. Now, if there are divergences as suggested by Moore, then it will be good to complement the scheme with

other measures such as Trentham's epistemological priorities and competencies used in this study in order to describe those types of growth that diverge outside of what the scheme best describes.

Second, the lack of measured development according to the MID among the seminarians should cause us to look more closely at what may be missing from the data collection methodology of this study or from the developmental environment of the evangelical seminary. For instance, the sample group did not show appreciable recognition of peers as partners in gaining and maintaining knowledge (see appendix 9). The fact that this was not evident in the interviews is not a fault of the Perry Scheme or the MID. We need to ask first whether the interview protocol is set-up in a way that should elicit this perspective if the seminarian possesses it. I think the Stuckert Interview Protocol does this (see appendix 5), but there are questions in the Alternate Perry Interview Protocol (see appendix 3) that are more direct in eliciting reflection on the roles that peers play in the learning process. Making the questions in the Stuckert Interview Protocol more direct is something to consider. Further, we are also asking whether there are things common to the evangelical seminary experience that are dampening the identification of peers as learning partners. Possibly a culture that emphasizes learning the 'right things' from the 'right people', i.e., the professors, is working against a realization of the importance of other students in the discovery of knowledge. Again, this bears further consideration.

In the section on evangelical seminaries and their students in chapter 2 above, I noted that seminaries are in the business of forming students. This data, though, should cause us to question more deeply what our practices and culture are seeking to form in our students. Are we so intent on turning out orthodox technicians of the soul that have been trained to act in a confessional, consistent manner in all situations that we are neglecting to encourage  students to think through answers for themselves? This is along the lines of what we noted in our interview analysis and what Trentham speculates in his

presentation (see appendix 12).

I hypothesized early on in this study that the average epistemological positioning of evangelical seminarians according to the Perry Scheme would be found to be generally consistent with that of other graduate level students and at some level more developed than the undergraduate samples in the previous studies. With the findings of this study, I have falsified this hypothesis (at least the second half), for this sample. This is progress. By falsifying the hypothesis, future researchers will be able to offer new, more nuanced, and more informed hypotheses regarding the intellectual and ethical maturity of evangelical seminarians.

The hypothesis for this study, I see now in retrospect, was borne primarily from my own experience as a seminary student. My recollections of seminary are of a time of profound transformation for me as a thinker and as a person.  Before seminary, I do not recall being engaged in debates that were above and beyond merely making the other submit. In seminary, though, I was encouraged by my peers to listen to others and seek to understand and empathize. Before seminary, I do not remember being encouraged (or at least I do not remember heeding this advice if it was given) to read widely and deeply in order to better understand God's world as he has designed it. For me, the seminary experience changed my intellectual trajectory and set me on a course to a much deeper engagement with knowledge. I expected that this experience was common and that it would manifest itself in noticeable increases in the measured epistemological development of seminary students. The data from this study did not confirm my assumptions.

Going forward as seminary administrators, these results should inform the way we instruct, guide, and interact with seminarians.  For example, many course evaluation forms focus solely or at least mostly on the performance of the instructor. Should not at least as much space be given to the experience of the seminarian? Should we not be asking if the class helped him to be a better thinker?  Would it not be helpful to know if

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she was engaged with her classmates? There is a world of experiences that can nudge seminarians to develop more mature and nuanced views of knowledge, we should be looking to see if it is happening on our campus. The academic counseling session is another place this may happen. We now have indications of some of the ways of knowing that seminary students may be neglecting, thus we can guide and direct them better. We can encourage them to pursue reciprocal relationships with others that are on the same pilgrimage of epistemological development. We can offer them space and a listening ear to reflect on their own thinking. The more aware we are of the seminary student's challenges; the more capable guides we have the possibility to become.

APPENDIX 1

THESIS STUDY PARTICIPATION FORM

**Instructions** Thank you for considering your participation in this research study.

For Section 1, please read the "Agreement to Participate" in its entirety. You may then

indicate your willingness to participate by checking the appropriate box. Please then

complete the fields for requested information.

**[Section 1]** The research in which you are about to participate is designed to explore the

impact of the seminary experience at different types of schools on the personal

development of seminary students. This research is being conducted by Jonathan Stuckert

for purposes of thesis research. In this research, you will complete the form below and

participate in a personal interview by telephone or web conference. Any information you

provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or

your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is voluntary and you

are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

By your completion of this form[1] and the subsequent personal interview, and

by checking the appropriate box below and entering the requested information, you are

giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

☐ Yes     ☐ No

Name: _____

Date: _____

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[1]The version of this form used with participants will be a Google form. This will allow for
convenient completion by participants and convenient collection for the researcher.

**[Section 2]** Biographical information.

Preferred name:_____

Personal email address:_____

Preferred phone number:_____

Year of birth: _____

Gender:_____

What is the name of your seminary?_____

Month and year of anticipated graduation:_____

Degree programs(s) ☐ Master of Divinity   ☐ Master of Arts

Do you belong to a denomination? ☐ Yes   ☐ No

If yes, which one?_____

Do you subscribe to a confession of faith? e.g. Baptist Faith and Message, Westminster

Confession of Faith. ☐ Yes   ☐ No

If yes, which one?_____

Did you grow up in the church? ☐ Yes       ☐ No

How many years have you been a Christian?_____

George Marsden gives this description, "Evangelicals . . . are Christians who typically

emphasize 1) the Reformation doctrine of the final authority of Scripture; 2) the real,

historical character of God's saving work recorded in Scripture; 3) eternal salvation only

through personal trust in Christ; 4) the importance of evangelism and missions; and 5) the

importance of a spiritually transformed life." According to this description, do you

consider yourself to be an evangelical? ☐ Yes       ☐ No

From which college or university did you graduate? _____

Did you attend any other colleges or universities? ☐ Yes   ☐ No

Did you work for more than a year between college and seminary? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Did you have a mentor during seminary? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Did you take any distance courses during seminary? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, approximately how much of your degree was done by

distance?_____

Which better describes your seminary experience? ☐ full-time student ☐ part-time

student

Which better describes your seminary experience? ☐ on campus ☐ commuter

Please rate these six influences on importance to your seminary experience. 1 is very

important and 5 is not important.

- Friends and peers
- Professors
- Required reading
- Seminary culture
- Local church involvement
- Supervised field education

APPENDIX 2

STANDARDIZED PERRY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. What is your view of an ideal college education? How, if at all, should a student change as a result of that educational experience?

2. Have you encountered any significant differences in beliefs and values in your peers in college or other people you've met in your experiences here? What is your reaction to this diversity; how do you account for these differences? How do you go about evaluating the conflicting views or beliefs you encounter? How, if at all, do you interact with people who have views different from your own?
[Note: The focus here is on the process of evaluating and/or interacting, not on specific beliefs or reactions per se]

3. Facing an uncertain situation in which you don't have as much information as you'd like and/or the information is not clearcut, how do you go about making a decision about what you believe? Is your decision in that situation the right decision? Why or why not? If so, how do you know?
[Note: Try to get the student to describe the process of coming to a judgment in that kind of situation, which in many cases will involve generating a concrete example of some personal relevance but not too emotionally-charged–preferably an academic-related context, related if possible to their major field.]

4. How would you define "knowledge"? How is knowledge related to what we discussed earlier in terms of a college education? What is the relationship between knowledge and your idea of truth? What are the standards you use for evaluating the truth of your beliefs or values? Do your personal beliefs/values apply to other people–in other words, are you willing to apply your standards to their behavior? Why or why not?

Possible follow-up probes in each area:
1. How have you arrived at this particular view of these issues? Can you remember a time when you didn't think this way and recall how your view changed over time?
2. To what extent do you think the view you have expressed is a logical and coherent perspective you've defined for yourself? What, if any, alternative perspectives have you considered?
3. How likely is it that your view will change in the future? If you think it's likely to change, what kind of experiences or situations might produce such change?

APPENDIX 3

ALTERNATE PERRY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

(This protocol is particularly useful for probing for post-position 5 reasoning.)

## 1. Looking Backward (College Learning Experience)

We're interested in learning how you view your overall educational experience in college. Later I'll ask you some specific questions, but for now, I'd just like you to tell me what seems important to you as you think about it--what stands out to you as you think about your experience here?

Alternatives: What about your college experience has influenced you the most—what stands out in your mind that has really made an impression on you and influenced you? or What overall sense do you make of your educational experience in college?

Probes (request examples, tie together threads of narrative, relate to earlier experiences):
Who has been important to you in your learning? (peers, faculty/administrators, family, others)
How have you changed in the way you approach learning since you've been in college?
How would you describe yourself–in general, and specifically as a learner?
Are there any ways in which you are different than before as a result of your experience in college? [Possible followup: If you could have your way, what kinds of changes in yourself would you have hoped to see as a result of your educational experience in college?]

## 2. Clarifying Convictions

Does it seem to you that usually there is only one opinion, idea or answer that is really right or true, or do you think there can usually be more than one? Explain.

Follow-up Probes (variable, depending on what seems appropriate with student):
What makes an opinion right? Are all opinions right? Can you say some opinions are better than others? How do you know? In terms of what makes an opinion "right," what role do you think experts and authorities need to play?
Is it important to obtain support for your opinions? What kind of support?
Do you think your outlook on this diversity of opinions has changed in recent years?
What/who led to this change?

It seems that with all the various ways of looking at things and all of the different opinions that exist, there's a very confusing variety of choices to make. Do you have any strong convictions to help guide you in these choices? Could you describe an example? [If necessary, define "conviction" as a point of view that one develops about an issue or subject over time, not an unexamined belief one has grown up with or inherited from one's parents or upbringing]

Follow-up Probes:
>How did you come to hold this point of view? Can you describe how your thinking developed? What alternatives did you consider in this process, and why did you discard them?
>Do you feel or have you ever felt that you would like to convince others of your ideas?
>What do you think when others have strong convictions and try to convince you?
>If someone attacks your belief [about opinions], how do you defend yourself?

Optional questions:
React to each of these statements, describing how and to what extent they apply to you:
"I never take anything someone says for granted. I just tend to see the contrary. I like to play the devil's advocate, arguing the opposite of what someone is saying, thinking of exceptions, or thinking of a different train of logic."
"When I have an idea about something, and it differs from the way another person is thinking about it, I'll usually try to look at it from that person's point of view, see how they could say that, why they think that they are right, why it makes sense to them."

**3. Looking Forward (Goals for future and career)**

What are your educational or career goals at this point? How have your educational or career goals changed since you started--for instance, do you have any goals now that you didn't have before, or do some you started with seem less worthwhile or realistic?

In what ways has the college specifically contributed to the achievement of your goals up to this point?

How do you think your experiences or accomplishments in college will connect or relate to what you do after college?

*In each question set, explore for:
>Synthesis/integration–pulling threads of narrative together
>Connection-making–between ideas, between discipline and personal experience, etc.
>Self-reflection–e.g., understanding of self-as-learner, as person considering career choices, etc.
>Meta-thinking–analysis of own thinking over time (i.e., how it's changed/evolved)

APPENDIX 4

TRENTHAM INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Questions regarding overall development through the college experience (RQs 1, 2)**
Thinking back through your college experience overall (to this point), what would you say most stands out to you?

How would you compare yourself as a college freshman with yourself now?
(Probes: . . . with regard to knowledge? learning? convictions? personal maturity? Personal faith? relationships?, etc. Also: Do you feel like you've "grown up" as a result of being in
college? How so?)

In what ways, if any, has your college experience prepared you for life after college? (Probes: How has your specific major prepared you for the future?)

Have you had someone who has been a personal mentor to you during college (e.g., a teacher, advisor, older adult, or minister)? (If yes . . . ) What was the impact or benefit of that relationship for you? (Probe: Do you think those types of relationships are important for college students?)

**Questions regarding perspectives on knowledge and learning (RQ2)**
What is your view of an ideal college education? How, if at all, should a student change through the college experience?

What is your idea of a great college course? (Probes: What do you gain from it? What is the role of the teacher? What is the role of the students? What type of assignments are most beneficial?)
> • Related (if necessary): What do you most value about the education you received in college? (Probes: What do you *least* value? What would you change if you could?)
> • Related (if necessary): Did you get to know many of your professors through college? How would you describe your relationship with the teacher(s) you got to know best? (Probe: What would you say are the top attributes of the best college teachers? What sort of relationship would you most like to have with your professors in seminary?)

Why do you feel it's necessary for you to go to seminary? (Probes: How did/will you choose the school? What's your purpose in obtaining a seminary degree? What do you hope to gain?)

**Questions regarding the impact of encounters with diversity (RQ3)**
Through college (in your classes, especially), did you encounter ideas which challenged your (Christian) beliefs and values? How did you (and how *do* you now) react to that sort of challenge? Is this something you value, looking back? Why? (Probes: Do you feel these types of challenging encounters are important? How so? How do you go about evaluating diverse and conflicting views when you encounter them?)
Through college, did you commonly interact with people who held different faiths or worldviews than your own? Did this sort of interaction occur in your classes? What impact did these types of interactions have on you, personally?

In your coursework, were you exposed to multiple disciplines of study (sciences, social sciences, humanities, etc.)? Do you feel this was a benefit to you, personally, and also in preparation for the future? How so?

**Questions regarding personal commitment (RQs 1, 2)**
When you face a situation where you have to make a decision about an uncertain or difficult issue, and you don't have as much information as you'd like or the information is not clearcut, how do you go about making a decision about what to believe or choose?
      • Related (if necessary): How do you go about arriving at your own positions on core issues and secondary issues, especially when it's hard or impossible to find definitive answers? (Probe: How do you decide on important-but-debatable issues when there are multiple opinions that seem equally valid (e.g., in matters of theology, practices in the church, etc.?))
      • Probe here about the relation of "proof" to personal knowledge/beliefs/faith.

Thinking about your Christian faith . . . were there times through college that you felt like you needed to "examine what you believe"? (Probes: Even core beliefs? What prompted that? Was this ultimately a positive or negative experience for you?)

Tell me about your "calling to ministry." (Probes: How did you make the decision to commit to vocational ministry? Did you ever consider a different career path? Were there times through college when you questioned or doubted your decision or your ministerial calling in general? How did you deal with that? Do you think about your commitment to ministry differently now than you did at first?)

**Final question**
To wrap this up, I've asked you questions about several different experiences and issues . . . but is there anything I haven't asked you about that you would say has been really significant or life changing through your time as a college student?

APPENDIX 5

STUCKERT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Questions regarding overall development through the seminary experience (RQs 1, 3)**
Thinking back through your seminary experience overall (to this point), what would you say most stands out to you?

How would you compare yourself as a first time seminary student with yourself now? (Probes: . . . with regard to knowledge? learning? convictions? personal maturity? Personal faith? relationships?, etc. Also: Do you feel like you've "matured" as a result of being in
seminary? How so?)

In what ways, if any, has your seminary experience prepared you for real life ministry? (Probes: which courses prepared you best?)

Have you had someone who has been a personal mentor to you during seminary (e.g., a teacher, advisor, older adult, or minister)? (If yes . . . ) What was the impact or benefit of that relationship for you? (Probe: Do you think those types of relationships are important for seminary students?)

**Questions regarding perspectives on knowledge and learning (RQs 1, 3)**
What is your view of an ideal seminary education? How, if at all, should a student change through the seminary experience?

What is your idea of a great seminary course? (Probes: What do you gain from it? What is the role of the teacher? What is the role of the students? What type of assignments are most beneficial? What is the culture of your seminary and how did it affect you? What was your involvement in the local church and how did it affect you? What did you do for supervised field education and how did it affect you? If you took distance courses, how did they contribute to your seminary experience? What were the key influences on your seminary experience?)
      • Related (if necessary): What do you most value about the education you received in seminary? (Probes: What do you *least* value? What would you change if you could?)
      • Related (if necessary): Did you get to know many of your professors through seminary? How would you describe your relationship with the professor(s) you got to know best? (Probe: What would you say are the top attributes of the best professors in seminary?)

• Related (if necessary): Did you take any distance courses during seminary? How would you describe the differences between residential and distance courses? How would you describe your development related to residential and distance courses?

Why did you feel it was necessary for you to go to seminary? (Probes: How did you choose the school? What was your purpose in obtaining a seminary degree? What did you hope to gain?)

**Questions regarding the impact of encounters with diversity (RQ 2)**
Through seminary (in your classes, especially), did you encounter ideas which challenged your beliefs and values? How did you (and how *do* you now) react to that sort of challenge? Is this something you value, looking back? Why? (Probes: Do you feel these types of challenging encounters are important? How so? How do you go about evaluating diverse and conflicting views when you encounter them?)

Through seminary, did you commonly interact with people who held different Christian traditions or commitments than your own? Did this sort of interaction occur in your classes? What impact did these types of interactions have on you, personally?

In your coursework, were you exposed to multiple perspectives on issues like the interpretation of the Bible, or the doctrine of baptism? Do you feel this was a benefit to you, personally, and also in preparation for the future? How so?

**Questions regarding personal commitment (RQs 1, 3)**
When you face a situation where you have to make a decision about an uncertain or difficult issue, and you don't have as much information as you'd like or the information is not clear-cut, how do you go about making a decision about what to believe or choose?
        • Related (if necessary): How do you go about arriving at your own positions on core issues and secondary issues, especially when it's hard or impossible to find definitive answers? (Probe: How do you decide on important-but-debatable issues when there are multiple opinions that seem equally valid (e.g., in matters of theology, practices in the church, etc.?))
        • Probe here about the relation of "proof" to personal knowledge/beliefs/faith.

Thinking about your Christian faith . . . were there times through seminary that you felt like you needed to "examine what you believe"? (Probes: Even core beliefs? What prompted that? Was this ultimately a positive or negative experience for you?)

Tell me about your "calling to ministry." (Probes: How did you make the decision to commit to vocational ministry? Did you ever consider a different career path? Were there times through seminary when you questioned or doubted your decision or your ministerial calling in general? How did you deal with that? Do you think about your commitment to ministry differently now than you did at first?)

**Final question**
To wrap this up, I've asked you questions about several different experiences and issues . . . but is there anything I haven't asked you about that you would say has been really significant or life changing through your time as a seminary student?

APPENDIX 6

WILLIAM S. MOORE AND THE CENTER FOR THE
STUDY OF INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

**Dr. William S. Moore**
Areas of Expertise:
• Teaching/learning issues
• Assessment of student learning
• Intellectual development
• Educational reform/policy issues
• Faculty/professional development
• Institutional effectiveness

Recent Work History:
• Policy Associate, Assessment, Teaching and Learning, *Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges*, Olympia, WA, 1990-present.
• Coordinator, *Center for the Study of Intellectual Development*, Olympia, WA, 1982-present.
• Visiting Professor, *University of Georgia*, Athens, GA, 1988-1989.
• Student Development Educator, *Longwood College*, Farmville, VA, 1983-1988.
• Coordinator, Career Planning Course, Career Development Center, *University of Maryland*, College Park, MD, 1981-1983.

Education:
• Ph.D. (December 1987) in College Student Personnel Administration (Emphasis: student development)
 -University of Maryland
 -Major Advisor: Dr. L. Lee Knefelkamp
 -Topic: "The Learning Environment Preferences: Establishing Preliminary Reliability and Validity for an Objective Measure of the Perry Scheme."
• M.A. (August 1976) in Counseling Psychology
 -University of Texas at Austin
 -Master's Report Topic: "Effects of Career Counseling on Locus of Control and Vocational Maturity"
• B.A., Special Honors (May 1973)
 -Plan II Honors program (concentrations in English and psychology)

Research/Publications
• (2006). "The Washington Transition Mathematics Project: Building Consensus and

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**Center for the Study of Intellectual Development**
The Center for Applications of Developmental Instruction (CADI) was established by L. Lee Knefelkamp and William S. Moore in 1982 at the University of Maryland as an informal organization for education, research, and services related to the Perry Scheme of Intellectual and Ethical Development.[1] In June, 1988, the Center merged with the Perry Network, previously operated by the Institute for the Study of Education in Mathematics (ISEM) in St. Paul, Minnesota, and was renamed the Center for the Study of Intellectual Development (CSID) to reflect more accurately its broad mission in facilitating quality research on the Perry scheme.

The Center's primary focus has been on the assessment of the Perry Scheme. Assessment approaches available from the Center cover a range of existing formats in developmental instrumentation: a structured interview, a recognition-style preference task–the Learning Environment Preferences (LEP), and a production-style essay–the Measure of Intellectual Development (MID). Each approach has particular uses and its own strengths and weaknesses, depending on the nature of the research/assessment being conducted. The instruments are complementary and can thus be used simultaneously if appropriate for a given project. MID essays have been used extensively in assessing student learning and evaluating educational experiences at a wide variety of institutions--community colleges

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[1]John David Trentham, "Epistemological Development in Pre-Ministry Undergraduates: A Cross-Institutional Application of the Perry Scheme." (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 233.

to research universities--all over the country, and to a limited extent internationally
(primarily England and Australia). The MID has proven to be a particularly useful
general indicator of the learning goals reflected in collaborative learning environments,
and has been used widely in evaluating learning communities nationally.

The CSID has facilitated many research projects using all three forms of instrumentation.
Recent major projects utilizing structured interviews have been undertaken with the
following institutions: Pennsylvania State University, Colorado School of Mines,
Western Washington University, The Evergreen State College, University of the Pacific,
and Cerritos College

APPENDIX 7

CSID INTERVIEW SCORING PROCEDURE AND
REPORTING EXPLANATION

**Interpreting MID Ratings**

The **MID**[1] is scored by raters who have trained extensively in the general Perry scheme and the specific rating process developed over the years by Knefelkamp (1978) and CSID (Knefelkamp et al, 1982). Because the instrument is designed to assess the part of the Perry scheme that we believe to be primarily cognitive/intellectual in focus, **MID** ratings range along a theoretical continuum from position one through position five. In practice, position one perspectives are not found (it was a hypothetical and conceptual extension of the model even in the original study), and thus the actual **MID** ratings will range from positions two through five.

The Rating System

Individual ratings on the **MID** are represented by a 3-digit number which reflects the dominant and (if necessary) the subdominant position/s rated in the essay. This system extends the Perry scheme continuum from 4 steps--that is, positions 2, 3, 4, and 5--to 10 steps: 222, 223, 233, 333, 334, 344, 444, 445, 455, & 555. Solid ratings (like 333) reflect a "stable position" perspective; the two steps between each stable position indicate transitional essays. As examples, 223 represents "dominant position 2 opening to position

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[1]" MID" refers to the Measure of Intellectual Development, a research instrument that obtains data from participants using essay prompts. The CSID's scoring procedure and method of classifying participants' epistemological positions according to the Perry Scheme is essentially identical for data collected using the Perry interview protocol and data collected using the MID. The information presented here includes relevant portions of a document that was provided to the researcher by the CSID.

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3," while 233 indicates "dominant position 3 with trailing position 2." The ratings thus reflect an assessment of the cognitive complexity displayed by the essay with respect to classroom learning along a linear, simple stage model continuum (see Rest, 1979, Judging Moral Issues, for a thorough discussion of simple vs. complex cognitive stage model assumptions).

Data Reporting

For reporting purposes, the MID ratings can be treated in either (or both) of two ways, as categorical data or as continuous data. Some statistical purists--often found on doctoral dissertation committees--insist that a measurement scale like the MID can only be treated as categorical data. Other experts, however, including respected psychometricians like Jum Nunnally (Psychometric Theory, McGraw-Hill, 1967), argue that such a strict interpretation is too rigid and not meaningful in practical terms for psychological scales. (For a more in-depth discussion of this topic, see the MID instrument manual.) Depending on the purpose and the audience of the research, the scores can be effectively used either way, and often are reported both ways for comparison purposes.

1) Grouping categories:

222 & 222(3) = Position 2                    444 & 444(5) = Position 4

223 & 233 = Transition 2/3                   445 & 455 = Transition 4/5

333 & 333(4) = Position 3                    555 = Position 5

334 & 344 = Transition ¾

Report the frequencies and percentages of students in each of the categories. These figures can then be converted to a histogram if desired, and in a longitudinal project, "profile shifts" to the right on this kind of chart indicates upward movement. For a good example of this kind of analysis, see Kirk Thompson's 1990 paper, available from the

Perry Network, on Evergreen State College data.

2) Continuous data:

Convert the rating scores to numbers as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| 222 & 222(3) = 2.0 | 344 = 3.67 |
| 223 = 2.33 | 444 & 444(5) = 4.0 |
| 233 = 2.67 | 445 = 4.33 |
| 333 & 333(4) = 3.0 | 455 = 4.67 |
| 334 = 3.33 | 555 = 5.0 |

Once the ratings are converted to these numerical scores, they can then be manipulated statistically however you choose (mean, standard deviation, etc.)

*"Glimpse" ratings (e.g., 333(4); see the rating notes on the following page for more details) can be treated numerically as a separate sub-stage. In the case of 333(4), for instance, it could be scored as a "3.17" (half of 1/3 a position, in effect). Conceptually, I would argue that these essays are different from 333 essays and the latter approach is preferable; practically, unless your sample has a lot of these ratings, it probably doesn't make much difference.

*In general, traditionally-aged students enter college in the position 2-position 3 transition and exit college 4 (or so!) years later in the position 3-position 4 transition. There is a modest but statistically significant effect by classification and by age, with the former seeming to be a stronger factor (with a great deal depending on the nature of the curricular interventions and learning experiences occurring in those intervening years). There seems to be no consistent difference by gender. Demographic data on ethnicity has been collected inconsistently over the years, and has become increasingly problematic in

terms of data quality and interpretation, so at the present no comparative data are provided for that dimension.

Rating Summary Sheet Notes

*Below is a general overview of the kinds of "rater shorthand" notes and comments you might see on the summary sheet of your data.*

* **BP**: "Ball Park" rating; there is insufficient data, or insufficiently clear data, for us to provide a full research rating with confidence--but enough for us to approximate, or "ballpark," a rating. People use such ratings in different ways; with formal research (and an adequate sample!), you might want to exclude them from the analysis. For most informal research purposes, however, it is reasonable to include BP ratings. In converting these ratings to continuous data, treat them as a half-stage; a "BP 2/3," for example, would convert to a "2.5" score.

* **Glimpse**: rater's notation that accompanies ratings like 333(4). Such a rating indicates that while the essay is seen as reflecting stable position 3, there is a hint, or "glimpse," of the next position (in this example, position 4) that is noted but not given sufficient weight to warrant a +1/3 position increment. We believe these essays are distinct from 334 or 333 essays, but you may prefer to simply consider them as 333 essays. You may also see 222(3) or 444(5), but these are less common.

* **Unr**: Unrateable; we do not think the data sample is adequate to provide any kind of rating. The reasons vary; sometimes students don't write the essay, sometimes they are simply too brief, and sometimes they either don't take the task seriously or they tangent in ways which make rating impossible. The percentage of Unrateables in samples is usually only 1-5% at most.

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* **Flooded**: there seems to be a strong emotional tone taken in the essay--usually in glowing positive terms (a professor, most often, who obviously had a powerful personal influence on the person), but sometimes harsh and negative as well. Such emotional "flooding" tends to obscure the cognitive rating, so we note its occurrence as a possible caution in reviewing the rating. Flooding does not make the data automatically unrateable, but it can make the essay rate as less complex than it might otherwise be.

* **Early**: essentially the same notion as "Glimpse," but on the "other side" of the position; that is, a 333 (Early) means that the essay is seen as borderline between a 233 rating and a full 333 rating. As with the "glimpse" notation, this reference is mainly useful for our rating and criteria research, and we do believe this is a distinct set of essays—but it's probably preferable to include them as 333 essays rather than a separate category.

* **2/4** or **3/5**: indicates that one or both of the raters noted this essay is an example of a rating split problem--a problematic essay that can be interpreted, for example, in the case of a **"2/4"** split, as being on either the position 2 or position 4 side of position 3. Conceptually, these splits result from the fact that there are close parallels between positions 2 and 4 and between positions 3 and 5 in the Perry scheme; practically, they give raters headaches! These essays are noted to allow us to go back to do closer analyses on these essays to help refine our rating criteria and decisions.

* **Q** : simply means that we think the essay in question is quotable, unusual, or for some other reason worth noting. You can use these signs to pull out the best essays for writing a section on the richness of the essay data or for presenting quotes to faculty; we use them primarily for rater training efforts and our ongoing rating criteria refinements.

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\* + or **-** : found beside individual ratings (as opposed to the final reconciled ratings), these signs are simply a rater's indication that s/he sees an argument for more than one rating: the one noted and the next 1/3 position step above (+) or below (-) it. These notes help facilitate the reconciliation process, but should be ignored when computing inter-rater agreement percentages.

## APPENDIX 8

## SCORED POSITIONS AND RATER NOTES

Table A1. Scored positions and rating notes

| Name | Position | Position description | Numerical | Position | Rater notes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alex D. | 233 | dominant 3 trailing 2 | 2.67 | 2-3 | 2/4 Split |
| Brandon | 233 | dominant 3 trailing 2 | 2.67 | 2-3 | 2/4 Split |
| Casey | 233 | dominant 3 trailing 2 | 2.67 | 2-3 | |
| Jamin | 233 | dominant 3 trailing 2 | 2.67 | 2-3 | 2/4 Split |
| Josh G. | 233 | dominant 3 trailing 2 | 2.67 | 2-3 | |
| Mark | 233 | dominant 3 trailing 2 | 2.67 | 2-3 | |
| Matt W. | 233 | dominant 3 trailing 2 | 2.67 | 2-3 | |
| Nick | 233 | dominant 3 trailing 2 | 2.67 | 2-3 | |
| Aaron | 333 | stable 3 | 3.00 | 3 | |
| Brian | 333 | stable 3 | 3.00 | 3 | |
| Daniel | 333 | stable 3 | 3.00 | 3 | |
| Justin | 333 | stable 3 | 3.00 | 3 | glimpse 4 |
| Jonathan S. | 333 | stable 3 | 3.00 | 3 | |
| Kevin | 333 | stable 3 | 3.00 | 3 | |
| Paul | 333 | stable 3 | 3.00 | 3 | glimpse 4 |
| Walton | 333 | stable 3 | 3.00 | 3 | |
| Alex Y. | 334 | dominant 3 opening to 4 | 3.33 | 3-4 | |
| Jonathan C. | 334 | dominant 3 opening to 4 | 3.33 | 3-4 | |
| Joshua K. | 334 | dominant 3 opening to 4 | 3.33 | 3-4 | |
| Tom | 334 | dominant 3 opening to 4 | 3.33 | 3-4 | |
| Andrew | 344 | dominant 4 trailing 3 | 3.67 | 3-4 | |
| Allan | 344 | dominant 4 trailing 3 | 3.67 | 3-4 | |
| Heath | 344 | dominant 4 trailing 3 | 3.67 | 3-4 | |
| Jim | 344 | dominant 4 trailing 3 | 3.67 | 3-4 | |
| Jay | 344 | dominant 4 trailing 3 | 3.67 | 3-4 | |
| Matthew D. | 344 | dominant 4 trailing 3 | 3.67 | 3-4 | |
| Steele | 344 | dominant 4 trailing 3 | 3.67 | 3-4 | |
| Mickey | 444 | stable 4 | 4.00 | 4 | |
| Craig | 445 | dominant 4 opening to 5 | 4.33 | 4-5 | 3/5 Split |
| Nate | 455 | dominant 5 trailing 4 | 4.67 | 4-5 | |
| *Mode* | 333 | *Mean* | 3.25 | *Std. dev.* | 0.52 |

PRIMARY CUES CITED AMONG SAMPLE

***MEASURE OF INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT* SAMPLE SUMMARY**
**PRIMARY CUES CITED**

*SOURCE*: Jonathan Stuckert          *DATE COLLECTED*: 2016          *Form*: Interviews

*SAMPLE OVERVIEW*: seminary students

**CUES FOR POSITION 2**
___ focus on facts/content—What to learn
___ learning as information exchange
___ "Teacher (Authority) is all" (T-centered)
___ emphasis on 1-to-1 relationship with teacher
___ peers noted primarily as "friends in class," "fun"
___ rule structures
___ focus on teacher providing structure/clarity
for learning
___ simple comfort in classroom/physical environment
___ emphasis on clearcut/straightforward grading
("no tricks")
___ use of absolutes and/or dichotomies in language
___ simplistic; focus on "fun," little on learning

___ Other cues and/or Quotes:

**CUES FOR POSITION 3**
___ concern w/ process/methods—How to learn
_x_ opening to multiplicity (multiple perspectives)
_x_ focus on practicality/relevance
_x_ learning a function of teacher/student relationships
_x_ student responsibility = working hard and/or learning
skills
_x_ discussion endorsed (peers provide diversity
of opinions)
___ "safe" and/or relaxed atmosphere
_x_ quantity/qualifiers; lots of details
___ focus on challenge/ hard work = good grades
___ emphasis on evaluation issues (especially fairness)
___ listing (simple, unelaborated); multiples w/ little
connection
___ Other cues and/or Quotes:

**CUES FOR POSITION 4**
_x_ focus on ways of thinking—How to think
___ concern w/ independent thinking, freedom
of expression
___ "anything goes" perspective ("Do Your Own Thing")
_x_ "New Truth" rules (absolutes within multiplicity)
_x_ teacher a facilitator/guide (source of way/s to think)
___ peers noted as sources of learning (but unelaborated)
_x_ student more active, taking more responsibility
for learning
___ increased self-processing, ownership of ideas
___ endorses loosely-structured format
___ rejects grading and/or memorizing ("regurgitation")
_x_ comfort w/ multiplicity, connections across disciplines
___ Other cues and/or Quotes:

**CUES FOR POSITION 5**
___ focus on qualitative evidence—How to judge in
context
___ reflection on own thinking ("meta-thought")
___ understanding of different frames of reference
___ greater tentativeness, openness in language
___ teacher as learning partner, source of expertise
___ peers seen as full partners in learning process
_x_ strong sense of self-as-agent in own learning

___ emphasis on synthesis of ideas and themes
_x_ endorses seminar, argument, discussion of ideas
___ acknowledges role of critique/evaluation in learning
___ appreciation for other perspectives (empathy)
___ Other cues and/or Quotes:

**GENERAL COMMENTS:**
"3-4" indicates a passage that reflect transition, with elements of both positions 3 and position 4
"3 (glimpse 4)" indicates mostly a position 3 focus with a possible glimpse of or early opening to position 4
"2/4 split" indicates a passage that could be interpreted as being on the 2 or 4 side of position 3, depending on the overall context

faith perspectives in interviews not always consistent with epistemological perspectives vis a vis learning

Center for the Study of Intellectual Development

APPENDIX 10

SCORING OF EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRIORITIES
AND COMPETENCIES

Table A2. Scoring of epistemological priorities and competencies

| Name | IA | IB | IIA | IIB | IIC | IID | IIIA | IIIB | IIIC | IIID | **Total** |
|------|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|-----------|
| Aaron | X | | X | X | | X | | | | X | 5 |
| Alex D | X | | | | | X | | X | | X | 4 |
| Alex Y | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | | X | 7 |
| Allan | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | 9 |
| Andrew | | | | | | X | | | | | 1 |
| Brandon | | X | | X | | X | | X | X | X | 6 |
| Brian | X | | X | X | | X | X | X | | X | 7 |
| Casey | | | X | X | | X | | X | | | 4 |
| Craig | X | X | X | | X | X | | | X | X | 7 |
| Daniel | X | | | X | | X | X | X | X | X | 7 |
| Heath | | X | X | | | X | | | | | 3 |
| Jamin | | | | X | | | | X | | X | 3 |
| Jay | X | X | X | X | | X | | | | X | 6 |
| Jim | | | | X | X | X | X | | X | X | 6 |
| Jonathan C. | X | | X | X | | X | | | | | 4 |
| Jonathan S. | X | | | | X | | X | X | | X | 5 |
| Josh G. | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | | | 7 |
| Joshua K. | | | | | X | | | | | X | 2 |

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| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Justin | X | | X | X | X | | | | | | 4 |
| Kevin | X | | X | X | X | | | | X | | 5 |
| Mark | X | | | X | | | X | | | | 3 |
| Matthew D. | X | | X | | X | | | X | | | 4 |
| Matt W. | | | X | X | | | | X | | | 3 |
| Mickey | X | | | X | | X | | | | X | 4 |
| Nate | X | | X | X | X | X | | | X | | 6 |
| Nick | X | | X | | | X | X | X | | | 5 |
| Paul | | | | | X | X | X | | X | | 4 |
| Steele | | X | X | X | X | X | | X | | X | 7 |
| Tom | X | X | | X | X | X | X | | X | | 7 |
| Walton | X | | | | | | X | | | | 2 |
| **Total** | 20 | 9 | 17 | 20 | 14 | 21 | 9 | 13 | 9 | 15 | |

APPENDIX 11

MID SCORES AND TOTAL EPISTEMOLOGICAL
PRIORITIES AND COMPETENCIES

Table A3. MID scores and total epistemological priorities and competencies

| MID positional score | Name | MID numerical score | Total priorities and competencies |
|---|---|---|---|
| 233 | Alex D. | 2.67 | 4 |
| 233 | Brandon | 2.67 | 6 |
| 233 | Casey | 2.67 | 4 |
| 233 | Jamin | 2.67 | 3 |
| 233 | Joshua | 2.67 | 2 |
| 233 | Mark | 2.67 | 3 |
| 233 | Matt W. | 2.67 | 3 |
| 233 | Nick | 2.67 | 5 |
| 333 | Aaron | 3.00 | 5 |
| 333 | Brian | 3.00 | 7 |
| 333 | Daniel | 3.00 | 7 |
| 333 | Justin | 3.00 | 4 |
| 333 | Jonathan S. | 3.00 | 5 |
| 333 | Kevin | 3.00 | 5 |
| 333 | Paul | 3.00 | 4 |
| 333 | Walton | 3.00 | 2 |
| 334 | Alex Y. | 3.33 | 7 |
| 334 | Jonathan C. | 3.33 | 4 |

| 334 | Joshua K. | 3.33 | 2 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 334 | Tom | 3.33 | 7 |
| 344 | Andrew | 3.67 | 1 |
| 344 | Allan | 3.67 | 9 |
| 344 | Heath | 3.67 | 3 |
| 344 | Jim | 3.67 | 6 |
| 344 | Jay | 3.67 | 6 |
| 344 | Matthew D. | 3.67 | 4 |
| 344 | Steele | 3.67 | 7 |
| 444 | Mickey | 4.00 | 4 |
| 445 | Craig | 4.33 | 7 |
| 455 | Nate | 4.67 | 6 |

*Pearson correlation coefficient* = 0.311607

APPENDIX 12

PRESENTATION TO THE 1892 CLUB

**The Scandal of the Seminarian Mind? A Speculative Overture**
John David Trentham, Ph.D.

<u>A leading question:</u>
What is theological education for?[1]

<u>A few notable quotations:</u>
• In *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith refers to "those who are called philosophers or men of speculation, whose trade it is not to do anything, but to observe everything."
• An inspired writer: …solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.
• Mark Noll: "The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind."

<u>A quick summary of essential findings and analysis:</u>
• A generalized seminarian perspective: The telltale mark of a good seminary education is that one has received the specialized training necessary to execute the duties of a conservative, evangelical pastor or ministry leader with biblical fidelity and accuracy.
• (Preliminary) finding of our most recent study: The scored level of intellectual and ethical maturity among evangelical seminarians is consistent with that of pre-ministry undergraduates.
• More provocatively: Our study suggests (gives rise to speculate that / gives cause to worry that) that evangelical seminarians, who have spent at least two years at a confessional seminary, are no more mature in their ways of knowing, critical reasoning, and creative decision making that their undergraduate counterparts.
• More provocatively-er: Evangelical seminaries may be training and commissioning individuals for gospel ministry while stunting, restricting, or otherwise not engaging their competency to pursue wisdom through convictional discernment and testing.

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[1]This appendix is adapted from a handout used by John David Trentham in a presentation he made to the 1892 Club at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary on October 12, 2016.

An explanation of the overarching research project:
• Comparative analysis of epistemological development among evangelical students in higher education
  -Completed: Comparative analysis of pre-ministry undergraduates from different institutional contexts
  -Three separate studies of pre-ministry undergraduates from each of the three original-study contexts
  -Currently: a study of epistemological development among undergraduates in confessional vs. non-confessional institutions
  -Currently: a study of epistemological development among evangelical seminarian men (in view here)
  -Next year: a study of epistemological development among evangelical seminarian women
  -Planned: four studies in this vein engaging (a) teleological priorities in Christian higher education, (b) gathered worship and doxological elements in Christian higher education, (c) technology-mediated learning and student formation, and (d) engagement with brain research in Christian higher education.
• The Perry Scheme
• The Principle of Inverse Consistency
• Methodology
  -30 semi-structured interviews, one hour in length, with each member of the study's sample population
  -Scored externally by the Center for the Study of Intellectual Development (CSID) for epistemological positioning acc. to the Perry Scheme
  -Analyzed independently according to a brilliantly conceived taxonomy of epistemological priorities and competencies

A word about this particular study and a few more findings:
• 30 evangelical seminarian men participated in this study.
• Five evangelical seminaries were represented among the sample.
• According to the CSID, 90% of evangelical seminarians included in our study scored at or below the expected range of intellectual development among typical undergraduates, generally.
• The mean of position scores among this sample is slightly below the undergraduate scores in our preceding studies.

A few speculative questions:
• Have evangelical seminaries become so insistent and careful to preserve and assure doctrinal fidelity among their students that they tend to excel in indoctrination to the

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detriment of personal epistemic maturation? I.e., do seminaries so effectively transmit orthodoxy that they simultaneously preclude deliberative questioning and creative reasoning on the part of students?

• Are evangelical seminary students so enamored with the confessional community ethos of "consensus," "likemindedness," "common identity," and "the faith once for all…" with regard to non-negotiable and primary elements of protestant-evangelical doctrine that they assume a posture of epistemic rigidness, non-reasoned deference to leading voices, or a multiplicitous perspective with regard to secondary and tertiary elements of doctrine? Do (we) professors facilitate this phenomenon? Are (we) professors unwitting epistemic bullies?

• Is the de facto epistemological attitude among seminarians that topics or ideas or doctrines requiring personal commitment are "settled" and therefore should be regarding as "factoids" (ref. Meek) to be utilized in ministry rather than semper-transformative truths to be increasingly discovered and creatively/missionally applied?

A few poking questions for budding (or seasoned) theological educators:

• How do you ensure that your students active (contributors) rather than passive (recipients) in your classroom? …in your assignments and learning activities?

• How do you discern and leverage the already-existing experiences, needs, and goals of your students?

• How much of your class preparation is focused on formulating good questions? Is your classroom a "critical learning environment"? (ref. Bain)

• What is the profile of student that you tend to have trouble connecting with? Have you ever thought about it?

• How are your course objectives and lesson plans tailored to appeal to your students' convictions and ability to engage ill-structured problems?

• How are your course objectives and lesson plans tailored to facilitate personal wisdom for growth in maturity and leadership rather than merely providing ready-made tools for application?

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ABSTRACT

ASSESSING EPISTEMOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT AMONG
EVANGELICAL SEMINARIANS

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This thesis is a contribution to Perry Scheme studies that have described and rated the intellectual and ethical development of students and others. The population of evangelical seminary students among three institutional types of seminaries is the unique contribution of this work. Seminary students are preparing for a career that requires critical thinking skills and the ability to discern solutions to complex problems. Developing thinking that is able to recognize and weigh divergent views is of the utmost concern. This qualitative research project was conducted through a semi-structured interview of seminary students, using open-ended questions and follow-up probes designed to elicit the students' understanding of the nature and justification of knowledge. The Center for the Study of Intellectual Development rated these according to the scheme developed by William Perry. The interviews were also analyzed by the researcher according to John David Trentham's categories of epistemological priorities and competencies.

KEYWORDS: Center for the Study of Intellectual Development, confessional, cognitive development, epistemological development, evangelical, higher education, Inverse Consistency Principle, John David Trentham, Master of Divinity, multiplicity, Perry Scheme, reflective judgment, relativism, seminarians, seminary, William Perry.

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