MONTESSORI GOES TO SEMINARY: ESTABLISHING A

FRAMEWORK FOR REDEMPTIVE FORMATION IN

THEOLOGICAL HIGHER EDUCATION

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A Thesis

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by

Jared Mark August

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**APPROVAL SHEET**

MONTESSORI GOES TO SEMINARY: ESTABLISHING A

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For the glory of God

and the formation of man

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PREFACE

Life is a twisting wilderness. That is certainly my experience, at least. To say that I did not plan to pursue a degree in education—an EdD, nonetheless—would be an understatement. Having completed my PhD in New Testament in 2018, I was thoroughly enjoying being on the other side, so to speak, as a professor at a small Bible college. I was living the dream, with no more nights of cramming, no more comprehensive exam prep, and no more dissertation writing. Yet as my wife, Allie, neared the halfway point of her turn as a doctoral student, studying Montessori childhood education, our conversations began to shift. We began to contemplate if the Montessori method—which was working quite well with our young son—could be appropriated for adult learners in theological higher education. Without even knowing it, sketched out on scrap paper and in notebooks, this thesis began to take shape. In all this, we could not help but see the gentle leading of our sovereign God, weaving our passions and academic curiosities together as only he can.

I am grateful to Southern Seminary, both for my professors (Drs. John David Trentham, Timothy Paul Jones, Justin Irving, and Anthony Foster) and cohort mates (Steven Peery, Megan Arledge, Sarah Gump, and Kevin Spratt), as well as the friends we met along the way (Drs. Evan and Vivian Pietsch, Sam Lee, among others). I am thankful to the administration of Northeastern Baptist College for providing a research sabbatical during the Fall 2023 semester. During our semester in Germany, High Point Baptist Church (with Pastor Duane and Daylin Beach) embraced our family just as Christian was welcomed to the Palace Beautiful in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Furthermore, I am indebted to colleagues and friends who challenged and encouraged me (Tony Levesque, Ralph Slater, Dr. Lorrie Francis, and Aaron Contino). Dr. Tom Cragoe

deserves a special note of thanks for his friendship, continued mentoring, and relentless support. He has now graciously encouraged me through the pursuit of two doctorates.

In a significant way, this study serves as the follow-up study to Allie's 2023 EdD thesis, "A Theological Analysis of the Educational Method of Maria Montessori Using an Inverse Consistency Protocol." Not only did she provide the academic reason to pursue this degree, though, but she also provided the encouragement and practical steps to make it possible. She is the embodiment of Proverbs 31:10–11, "An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain." A thank you goes to our son, Ransom, and daughter, Evely, for being our Montessori children, and to Mom and Dad, for your love and support, even when you thought we were crazy!

Beyond all else, I am grateful to the Living God, the One who relentlessly works to conform us to the image of his Son (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). As I step out uncertain of what the Lord may have in store, I rejoice that

> Thy goodness has been with me during another year, leading me through a twisting wilderness, in retreat helping me to advance, when beaten back making sure headway. Thy goodness will be with me in the year ahead; I hoist sail and draw up anchor, With thee as the blessed Pilot of my future as of my past. I bless thee that thou hast veiled my eyes to the waters ahead. (*Valley of Vision*, "Year's End")

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Upon arriving to the campus of the modern theological seminary, one finds a setting largely indistinguishable from other educational facilities. Although likely well-maintained, with manicured grass, impressive buildings, and a collegiate appearance, consider the ever familiar classroom environment: clean white walls, bright fluorescent lights, tables and desks set in precise rows, a podium from which to lecture, a projector ready to broadcast a slideshow, and a dry-erase board on which to write.[1] This same room could easily double as a middle/high school classroom or a university lecture hall for any range of subjects—from mathematics to sociology and from history to chemistry. This room could be reproduced around the world with little-to-no adjustment, minus perhaps the technological features.

This raises the question, however, as to whether the purpose of a course of study should impact the educational environment. In other words, specific to this study, should the seminary replicate the educational methods of secular institutions, or should this environment be altogether distinct in curriculum, pedagogy, instructional techniques, institutional objectives, student assessment, and classroom aesthetics? This study suggests the latter, that seminary education should be altogether distinct. It attempts to do so by proposing a framework for redemptive formation in theological higher education

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[1] This is if the seminary still maintains a physical campus at all, given the increase in online studies in recent years. For example, see Jo Ann Deasy, "How Effective Is Online Theological Education?" *In Trust* (Winter 2021): 11–13. Deasy notes, "Today 70 percent of ATS schools are approved to offer comprehensive distance education programs" (11). See also Cornelis van der Knijff, "Re-engaging Spiritual Formation in Online Theological Education," *Transformation* 38, no. 4 (2021): 316–29. Van der Knijff comments, "Impelled by the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous theological faculties and seminaries have rapidly moved to forms of online education" (316).

based upon Maria Montessori's alternative educational approach.

## Background to Research Problem

In his article, "Aiming for Christian Education, Settling for Christians Educating," John E. Hull argues, "What normally passes for *Christian education* can be more accurately named *Christians educating*."[2] Hull maintains that Christian educators have unfortunately often had too small a vision of what an authentically Christian education entails. In this way, he draws the distinction between *Christian education* and *Christians educating*:

> *Christian education* connotes a biblically grounded, alternative kind of education that rejects the whole matrix of scientific and humanistic ideals that currently vie to define the purpose of the public school. [This sort of school is based] on a comprehensive and distinctly Christian educational philosophy.
> *Christians educating* stands for a Christianity-enhanced public school brand of education. . . . The distinguishing character of [this sort of] Christian school revolves around what the teachers "add" to the students' educational experience by means of their moral integrity, devotional piety, and biblical insights into a select group of controversial topics. Guided by this smaller vision, Christian school educators can expect to reach their goals without overhauling either the school system or the popular notion of what it means to be educated. [3]

As might be expected, the results differ quite significantly between these two approaches. The aim of the latter—*Christians educating*—is to "elevate the academic and spiritual standards of the traditional public school model."[4] In contrast to this approach, in the former—*Christian education*—"The expected consequence . . . is the transformation of the school's educational goals, curriculum, pedagogy, student evaluation, and

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[2] John E. Hull, "Aiming for Christian Education, Settling for Christians Educating: The Christian School's Replication of a Public School Paradigm," *Christian Scholars Review* 32, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 204.

[3] Hull, "Aiming for Christian Education," 204.

[4] Hull, "Aiming for Christian Education," 204. Hull does not entirely dismiss this approach and recognizes a third possibility: "It may be fruitful to define Christian education by its fidelity, not its difference" (213). Hull continues, "The suggestion that Christian education can be faithful without being fundamentally different from public school education could serve as a liberating concept for those weighed down by the responsibility of building a new educational model" (213).

organizational structure."[5] In this way, although Hull recognizes both as potentially valid,

he asserts that a truly Christian education will look fundamentally different. This is so in

regard to both the "explicit curriculum" (including stated purpose, mission, and goals) as

well as the "hidden curriculum" (including classroom environment, pedagogy, and

aesthetics).[6]

Although writing of Christian education in general, Hull's comments are

certainly applicable to theological higher education, where the educational methods of the

confessional seminary are often indistinguishable from the methods of secular institutions

of higher learning. This dilemma is widely recognized and discussed by various Christian

educators.[7] An institution of theological higher education is often considered *Christian*

simply because of the required Bible classes, the professed faith of the faculty, and the

presence of weekly chapel services.

In this way, a variety of educational methods have often been embraced

uncritically in theological education. For example, in his dissertation on pedagogical

methods for seminary distance education, Gabriel Etzel argues, "Nearly all educational

institutions—including theological institutions—have embraced online learning in recent

years. However, this choice has rarely been rooted in deep theological or even

pedagogical reflection. Instead, this choice has typically been driven by pragmatic

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[5] Hull, "Aiming for Christian Education," 204.

[6] Robert W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction in Evangelical Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 236. Pazmiño defines the *explicit curriculum* as "the stated or public purposes and particulars of an educational program or event," the *hidden curriculum* as "those nonacademic and systematic side effects of education that are sensed, but which cannot be adequately accounted for by reference to the explicit curriculum," and the *null curriculum* as "that which is not taught by choice or oversight" (236–38).

[7] For example, Ted Ward comments, "Christian education is *neither*. In far too many cases, Christian education is neither thoroughly Christian nor soundly educational." Ted Ward, "Facing Educational Issues," in *Reader in Christian Education Foundations and Basic Perspectives*, ed. Eugene Gibbs (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 33. Likewise, Gordon H. Clark states that Christian education is far too often a program "of pagan education with a chocolate coating of Christianity." Gordon H. Clark, *A Christian Philosophy of Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 210. This concept is developed and discussed by George K. Knight, *Philosophy and Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 4th ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006), 164.

considerations."[8] The concern of this present study reflects that of Etzel, yet goes beyond merely the adoption of online learning. Could it be that many, if not most, theological institutions have embraced the pedagogical techniques and educational assumptions of the day in a way that has rarely been rooted in deep theological or pedagogical reflection? Perhaps the very essence and design of the modern seminary has been driven by largely pragmatic considerations related to finances, enrollment, and accreditation.[9]

It has been argued: "Seminary classrooms are perhaps the single most important and most feasible place for formation to occur."[10] If this is true—if the seminary campus is intended as a location in which holistic transformation and spiritual formation are to occur (a place where, in the words of the apostle, one might be "conformed to the image of Christ")—then perhaps the educational methods (from curriculum and pedagogy to instructional techniques, and from institutional objectives to student assessment and classroom aesthetics) ought to be distinct.[11] This, of course, raises the issue of current trends in theological higher education.

**Trends in Theological Education**

Although theological education can be traced throughout biblical history, theological *higher* education is a far more recent trend. For the purposes of this study, the

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[8] Gabriel Benjamin Etzel, "Implications of Theological Anthropology for Online Pedagogy in Graduate-Level Ministerial Training" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 20. See also, Timothy Paul Jones, John Cartwright, Gabriel Etzel, and Christopher Jackson, *Teaching the World: Foundations for Online Theological Education* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2017).

[9] About pragmatic decision in Christian education in general, Kyle R. Hughes asserts, "What if this [alternate] approach would make our school less appealing to colleges, graduate schools, or prospective employers? What if no one enrolled? There is a legitimate concern here for practical and economic reasons that is understandable enough, and yet to the extent that we fail to embark on this difficult work, our ability to provide a truly Christian education, and thereby participate in the work of forming Christian disciples and setting forth an authentic, countercultural Christian witness, suffers." Kyle R. Hughes, *Teaching for Spiritual Formation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2022), 5.

[10] Mary-Ann Winkelmes, "The Classroom as a Place of Formation: Purposefully Creating a Transformative Environment for Today's Diverse Seminary Population," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 7, no. 4 (2004): 214.

[11] Many of these elements relate not necessarily to the *explicit* curriculum, but rather to the *hidden* curriculum and the *null* curriculum. Again, see Pazmiño, *Christian Education*, 236–38.

terms "theological higher education" and "seminary" are generally used interchangeably. The main distinction being that "seminary" is defined as a degree-granting graduate school for ministerial training that focuses primarily on the education of pastors and other church/para-church staff (whether vocational or non-vocational), whereas "theological higher education" includes undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate study toward the same end. This includes accredited university-based and free-standing institutions as well as church-based institutions.[12] As Justo L. Gonzáles notes, "The word *seminary* itself meant 'seedbed.' Therefore, what was intended was, as in a seedbed, to plant a large number of candidates, care for them in their growth process, and finally transplant them to the places where their ministry was to take place."[13] In this way, the original seminaries were intended for the training of clergy for ministerial service.[14] González further describes the seminary as it was historically envisioned:

> [Seminary education] came to be a combination of the ancient monastic lifestyle—life in community, with established times of prayer, discipline, and so forth—with university studies. This combination of academic studies with community life was a model followed also by many modern Protestant seminaries. . . . In all of this, part of what was sought was that learning would be pleasant, that the curiosity of students would be stimulated, and that they would be trained for an entire life of continued study. . . . Life in a seminary must include, besides studies, prayer and recreation.[15]

In essence, the original seminaries were uniquely designed for the formal preparation of ministerial students for a lifetime of Christian service.

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[12] For a history of seminary education, see Justo L. Gonzáles, *The History of Theological Education* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2015). For proposals regarding alternative models of seminary, see among others, John M. Frame's classic, "Proposal for a New Seminary," *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 2, no. 1 (1978): 10–17; Paul R. House, *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision: A Case for Costly Discipleship and Life Together* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015); Daniel O. Aleshire, *Beyond Profession: The Next Future of Theological Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021).

[13] González, *History of Theological Education*, 81.

[14] The term "seminary" was first employed by Cardinal Reginald Pole in the 1550s "during the brief restoration of Catholicism in England under the reign of Mary Tudor," and by 1563, the Council of Trent had formally advocated the establishing of seminaries. González, *History of Theological Education*, 80–81. Accordingly, the goal of the original "seminaries" was for the training of English clergy in the Catholic church. Quickly, though, this term began to be used of Protestant theological education as well.

[15] González, *History of Theological Education*, 82, 84.

The modern seminary—although certainly quite distinct from its earlier predecessors—is still closely related even though it has fragmented into distinct types of seminaries. Michael Lee Wilburn categorizes the four modern types of seminaries as each being characteristic of one of four cities: Athens, Berlin, Jerusalem, and Geneva.[16] They may be summarized as follows:

> *Athens* represent[s] theological education focused on identity formation and personal transformation. . . . *Berlin* represent[s] theological education focused on professional education through applied theory and practice. . . . The *Jerusalem* model views theological education as a teaching ministry of the church. . . . The *Geneva* model is a confessional approach to theological education with the goal of knowing God through faith traditions, creeds, and confessions.[17]

In this way, there is some intrinsic difficulty in referring to a single unified vision of "seminary," even within confessional Christianity.

Nonetheless, despite this diversity there has been an increasing call in recent years for seminary education to be more accessible to all Christians, not just those who pursue vocational or ordained ministry. González makes this point strongly:

> Theological studies are not the specialty of the ordained ministry, like medical studies are the specialty of physicians, but rather the way in which the church and all its members, both jointly and individually, express our love for God, as the commandment says, with all our minds. . . . It is because we have forgotten this that we have developed an entire system of theological education quite apart from Christian education, with the inevitable result that the laity comes to think of biblical and theological studies as a matter for specialists.[18]

His argument is closely related to the ultimate aim or purpose of theological education. In similar fashion, Daniel O. Aleshire questions the purpose of modern theological

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[16] Michael Lee Wilburn, "Educational Philosophy, Church Proximity, and Academic Standards in Church-Based Theological Education: A Phenomenological Study" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 2. Wilburn comments, "The history of the [seminary] debate swings less like a smooth pendulum and more like a tug-of-war as problems, trends, personalities, and institutions pull with competing agendas" (1).

[17] Wilburn, "Educational Philosophy, Church Proximity, and Academic Standards," 2 (emphasis added). Wilburn's discussion is based upon several sources, including David H. Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), and Robert J. Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[18] González, *History of Theological Education*, 118.

education as it is currently structured: "This argument gets to the heart of a question about the ultimate purpose of theological education: Is it primarily about equipping professionals for socially defined ministerial practice, or is it about acquiring a theological understanding that orders life and thought as the basis for ministerial work as well as Christian life?"[19] Aleshire continues, "In the minds of many, the question is more philosophical: Should education for ministry depend on graduate degrees?"[20] Again, the question relates to the fundamental purpose of the modern seminary.[21]

The purpose of this study is not to argue for a specific approach to seminary education in regard to institutional structure (e.g., Wilburn's Athens, Berlin, Jerusalem, or Geneva). This study does not seek to promote or advocate a certain type of seminary education such as church-based theological education,[22] church-sponsored theological education,[23] university-based divinity-school education,[24] nor free-standing seminary education.[25] Although this is certainly an important topic, it is simply outside the scope of

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[19] Aleshire, *Beyond Profession*, 18.

[20] Aleshire, *Beyond Profession*, 19.

[21] "The remedy for this [viewing theological studies strictly as a matter for specialists] must be no less than a radical transformation in theological education—a transformation that cannot be limited to curricular matters or to means of communication and evaluation but must be grounded on a renewed vision of theological education. In this vision, all of Christian life is, among other things, a life of theological study and reflection. This should lead to an uninterrupted continuity between Christian education as it is provided in the local church and that which is available to more advanced students." Gonzáles, *Theological Education*, 119.

[22] For example, among others, Virginia Beach Theological Seminary, Bethlehem College and Seminary, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Shepherds Theological Seminary, Southern California Seminary, The Master's Seminary.

[23] For example, among others, the seminaries of the Southern Baptist Convention (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and Gateway Seminary), or the seminary of the Presbyterian Church in America (Covenant Theological Seminary).

[24] For example, among others, Beeson Divinity School (Samford University), Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Trinity International University), McMaster Divinity College (McMaster University).

[25] For example, among others, Fuller Theological Seminary, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Westminster Theological Seminary, Phoenix Seminary.

this study. Rather, the aim of this study is to consider—and propose an alternative to—the current methodology of any of these institutions of theological higher education.

**The *Telos* of Theological Education**

The aim and goal—the *telos*, or ultimate objective—of any educational approach ought to drive its methodology.[26] Despite the fact that theological higher education has not often provided a rigorous educational methodology (in the earlier words of Hull, often "Christians educating" rather than true "Christian education"), this is not for a lack of general unity on the *telos* of Christian education. In fact, there is a surprising consensus on this topic.

A number of insightful comments have been made in recent years regarding the *telos* of Christian/theological education. For example, Aleshire states,

> The goal of theological education should be the development of a wisdom of God and the ways of God, fashioned from intellectual, affective, and behavioral understanding and evidenced by spiritual and moral maturity, relational integrity, knowledge of the Scripture and tradition, and the capacity to exercise religious leadership.[27]

To Aleshire, it is not enough for one to be merely vocationally equipped, or intellectually stimulated. The goal, rather, involves the development of "wisdom," "maturity," and "integrity." In similar fashion, James K. A. Smith asserts,

> An education . . . is a constellation of practices, rituals, and routines that inculcates a particular vision of the good life by inscribing or infusing that vision into the heart (the gut) by means of material, embodied practices. . . . The primary goal of Christian education is the formation of a peculiar people—a people who desire the kingdom of God and thus undertake their vocations as an expression of that desire.[28]

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[26] "Metaphysics, the issue of ultimate reality, is central to any concept of education because it is important that the educational program of the school be based upon fact and reality rather than fancy, illusion, or imagination. Varying metaphysical beliefs lead to different approaches and even separate systems of education." Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 19.

[27] Aleshire, *Beyond Profession*, 82.

[28] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, vol. 1, Cultural Liturgies (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 26, 34.

To Smith, the goal of Christian education is "the formation of a peculiar people."[29] Kyle R. Hughes similarly writes,

> The ultimate end (that is, the *telos*) of Christian education is to help shape students' understanding of 'the good life' as one that is centered on Christ and his kingdom, such that they are challenged to reorient more and more of their lives in light of the gospel . . . Christian education must go beyond teaching a Christian worldview to forming an entire way of life, in which students pursue moral progress, cultivate virtue, and imitate Christ.[30]

Although developing a distinctively Christian worldview is undoubtedly a key component of any Christian education, it must not end there. It must result in a changed life, one that "imitates Christ." Related to this concept of the student being made more like Christ, John David Trentham describes the end goal of Christian education. Trentham writes, "When Christian education is at its best, the church's people are viewed as the church's primary stewardship, that they may be transformed unto Christlikeness, for the glory of God."[31] This concept of the purpose of education being the transformation of an individual unto the likeness of Christ is reinforced throughout the New Testament.

For example, in Romans 8:29, the apostle Paul writes, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."[32] This passage, which proclaims God's sovereignty, articulates the divine purpose of human "sufferings" (8:18) and "weaknesses" (8:26). In 8:28, Paul notes that all things "work together for good," which involves one being "conformed to the image of his Son" (8:29). Similarly, in

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[29] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 34.

[30] Hughes, *Teaching for Spiritual Formation*, 3. Hughes continues this definition, "Rather than reducing students to . . . 'brains on a stick,' empty containers into which the expert teacher pours her knowledge, this approach to education proceeds from a truly Christian anthropology that sees students, like all people, as embodied beings, who by means of their habits, relationships, and the Holy Spirit are formed into people who come to desire the things of God above the things of this world" (3).

[31] John David Trentham, "Mere *Didaskalia*: The Vocational Calling and Mission of Christian Teaching Ministry," *Christian Education Journal* 18, no. 2 (2021): 226.

[32] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the *English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).

2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul states, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another." The similarity of these passages is worth noting. The believer is "conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29); "transformed into the same image" (2 Cor 3:18). In both of these passages, Paul's goal is to summarize details regarding the believer's formation unto Christlikeness.[33] Throughout the New Testament—especially in the pastoral epistles—the concept of theological education is often found to involve the passing on of the faith from one generation to another (e.g., 1 Tim 1:3–7; 4:7–16; 2 Tim 2:2; 3:16–17; 4:1–5; Titus 2:11–15; 3:8). Particular attention is given to the development of church teachers and leaders (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9; cf. 1 Cor 12:27; Eph 4:11–16). The goal of Christian instruction is consistently the transformation of believers (Acts 3:19; Rom 12:2; Gal 5:22–23; Col 3:5; Jas 2:17, 26).

In this way, the *telos* of Christian/theological education is, broadly speaking, the formation of the believer into the likeness of Christ. This might be summarized concisely as "the formation of man," in that the believer is to be formed *personally* (to the image of Christ, Rom 8:29), *ethically* (unto a sanctified manner of living, 1 Cor 6:11), *developmentally* (having the mind of Christ, Phil 2:5–8), *spiritually* (as an act of service to God, Rom 12:1–2), and *vocationally* (for readiness in teaching and preaching, 2 Tim 2:2; 4:2).[34] If "the formation of man" (as here defined) is the *telos*, perhaps the educational methods of theological education ought to reflect this. Hughes insightfully comments,

> Indeed, it is easier for Christian educators to adopt the presuppositions, ideals, and values of the prevailing instrumentalist model of secular education, to add on a weekly chapel time and make some occasional efforts to connect Scripture to class

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[33] This transformation into the likeness of Christ can certainly be distinguished from the eschatological hope of the believer who anticipates *complete* transformation at Christ's return (1 Cor 15:49; Phil 3:21; 1 John 3:2).

[34] "The formation of man" is used here in a general sense, referring to broadly to both men and women. It may be clarified, "the formation of human beings."

content, than to do the work of moving in the direction of providing an education that would result in the transformation of the school's educational goals, curriculum, pedagogy, student evaluation, and organizational structure.[35]

Although it may be "easier for Christian educators to adopt the presuppositions, ideals, and values of the prevailing instrumentalist model of secular education," perhaps an alternative approach is warranted.

This study, therefore, aims to propose an alternative framework that is rooted first in the ultimate aim or goal—the *telos*—of theological education as understood from a confessional Christian perspective: "the formation of man." In view of the *telos* of theological education, perhaps a more appropriate educational model is to be preferred, namely the Montessori method.

## The *Telos* of Montessori Education

The Catholic pedagogue Maria Montessori (1870–1952) is widely known for developing the unique approach to childhood education that bears her name: the Montessori Method.[36] This approach holds to a specific vision of the role of the teacher, a certain view of the student, and the necessity of a uniquely prepared environment.[37] Montessori's approach to early childhood and elementary education has been adopted by thousands of Montessori schools in the United States[38] and tens of thousands of schools worldwide.[39] Furthermore, recent studies have suggested that Montessori's education

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[35] Hughes, *Teaching for Spiritual Formation*, 5.

[36] Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2002); Montessori, *The Advanced Montessori Method*, Montessori Series 9 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2016).

[37] As the International Montessori Accrediting Council (MAC) states, "Montessori teaching broadly reflects an adult function of observing children with freedom in a prepared environment." International Montessori Society, "Essential Standards of the International Montessori Accrediting Council," accessed January 15, 2024, https://imsmontessori.org/programs/imac-accreditation/essential-standards/. See also E. M. Standing, *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work* (New York: Plume, 1957), xiii.

[38] Jacqueline Cossentino, "Ritualizing Expertise: A Non-Montessorian View of the Montessori Method," *American Journal of Education* 111, no. 2 (February 2005): 211–44. Cossentino notes that there are "over 4,000 [Montessori] schools in the U.S. alone" (212).

[39] Angeline S. Lillard and Virginia McHugh, "Authentic Montessori: The Dottoressa's View at the End of Her Life Part I: The Environment," *Journal of Montessori Research* 5, no. 1 (2019): 1–18.

model is particularly congruent with historic, orthodox Christian thought reflecting a biblical anthropology,[40] and is perhaps the most viable educational methodology for school reform, especially Christian school reform.[41] Although Montessori's approach has received widespread acclaim, there has been surprisingly little written regarding the viability of this pedagogical approach to adult education.

As stated earlier, the aim and goal—the *telos*, or ultimate objective—of any educational approach ought to drive its methodology. This is certainly the case with the Montessori method. In view of Montessori's voluminous writings, this study proposes that the *telos* of Maria Montessori's educational approach is "the formation of man."[42] Perhaps most clearly stated, according to Montessori herself, "If 'the formation of man' becomes the basis of education, then the coordination of all schools from infancy to maturity, from nursery to university, arises as a first necessity: for man is a unity, an individuality that passes through interdependent phases of development."[43] In this understanding, "the formation of man" ought to be the "basis of education." What does Montessori mean by "the formation of man"? She discusses this concept extensively in her book by the same title, *The Formation of Man*. Here Montessori describes the goal of education by paraphrasing a verse from the Psalms:

The ideal, the proposed aim, however, must be common to all. Its realization must

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Lillard and McHugh state, "Tens of thousands of Montessori schools exists worldwide" (2).

[40] Alair August, "A Theological Analysis of the Educational Method of Maria Montessori Using an Inverse Consistency Protocol" (EdD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023); August, "A Christian Appropriation of Montessori's Holistic Vision of Education," *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 26, no. 2 (2022): 3–26.

[41] Jaeuk Jeong, "Montessori as a School Reform Alternative Reflecting Biblical Anthropology," *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 29, no. 3 (2020): 307–27.

[42] For simplicity, throughout this study, Montessori's masculine-exclusive language "the formation of man" is maintained for historical consistency, even as she refers to human beings in general.

[43] Maria Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, Montessori Series 12 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2007), 80. Montessori's "formation of man" is not to be equated precisely with the *telos* of theological education as defined above, based on a confessional Christian perspective. Montessori's *telos* is based on her Roman Catholic theology and applied specifically to childhood education. They are certainly similar, as this study suggests, yet theological distinctives should not be ignored.

lead to what has been said in regard to man in the Scriptures: *Specie tua et pulchritudine tua intende, prospere procede et regna*!" [Vulgate Ps 44:5; English Ps 45:4]. We might paraphrase it thus: "Understand thyself and thy beauty, proceed prosperously in thine environment, rich and full of miracles, and reign over it!"[44]

To Montessori, this concept of understanding oneself and one's God-given value, living in community with others in a specific environment, and being productive are all essential elements to her vision of the formed man.[45]

In Montessori's, "The Child in the Church," her approach is summarized as more than merely a general method of instruction: "Its object is to influence the whole life of the child: it aims, in short, at a total development of the personality, a harmonious growth of all the potentialities of the child, physical and mental, according to the law of its being."[46] In this way, Montessori's educational approach is fundamentally focused on developing the holistic being of the student; neither intellectual knowledge nor vocational skill alone are enough.[47] Montessori states, "Men with hands and no head, and men with head and no hands are equally out of place in the modern community."[48] Again, effective education must form the entire person. Montessori stresses this reality across the developmental stages:

> We must take man himself, take him with patience and confidence, across all the planes of education. We must put everything before him, the school, culture, religion, the world itself. We must help him to develop within himself that which will make him capable of understanding. It is not merely words, it is a labour of education. This will be a preparation for peace—for peace cannot exist without

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[44] Maria Montessori, *The Formation of Man*, Montessori Series 3 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2007), 14–15.

[45] "Joy, feeling one's own value being appreciated and loved by others, feeling useful and capable of production are all factors of enormous value for the human soul." Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 82.

[46] Maria Montessori, "The Child in the Church," in *Montessori: On Religious Education*, ed. Maria Montessori and E. M. Standing (Lake Ariel, PA: Hillside Education, 2020), 140–41.

[47] "In short, for students, Imago Dei . . . is the educational goal of the Montessori education or the why-to-learn." Jeong, "Montessori as a School Reform Alternative," 316.

[48] Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 58.

justice and without men endowed with a strong personality and a strong conscience.[49]

In this educational approach, men must develop morally—or, in Montessori's words, "with a strong personality and a strong conscience." On what does Montessori base her vision of the formation of man as the goal of her approach? This idea is firmly rooted in her Catholic Christian faith.

Although some have suggested that Montessori's spirituality is vague and undefined (for example, Karen Bennetts and Jane Bone write, "The spirituality to which Montessori most often referred was universal and secular"[50]), even a cursory reading of her writings reveals with pointed clarity the Christian—specifically Catholic—foundation of this spirituality.[51] When questioned if her method is "complete" when adapted to the secular classroom, Montessori responded,

> It is complete enough from Miss __'s point of view. She is not a Catholic and has no clear conception of the Super-natural Order. She is busy with the development of the *natural* faculties of the child, and therefore she does not feel the need of another room for the "super-natural." People who spent their whole time sleeping would only need a room fitted with beds![52]

Although Montessori approved of her approach's viability in the secular classroom, this was never its primary setting.[53] About this, Montessori comments, "The application of the method followed in my 'Children's Houses' produced this excellent fruit—the Church

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[49] Maria Montessori, *Citizen of the World: Key Montessori Readings*, Montessori Series 14 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2019), 38.

[50] Karen Bennetts and Jane Bone, "Adult Leadership and the Development of Children's Spirituality: Exploring Montessori's Concept of the Prepared Environment," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 24, no. 4 (2019): 357.

[51] When asked about what environment is best suited to developing the spiritual nature of an individual, Montessori responded, "Such an environment already exists. It is the Church. What is the Church if it is not a specially prepared environment for drawing out and sustaining the super-natural life of man?" Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 26.

[52] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 30.

[53] "Though Montessori's worldview is devout Catholic Christian, she counterpoises her languages so deftly as to be acceptable to those with other religious backgrounds." Jeong, "Montessori as a School Reform Alternative," 312.

almost seemed to be the end of the education which the method proposed to give."[54] In

this way, Montessori's educational method is built upon a Catholic Christian approach to

spirituality.[55] As Standing summarizes in an editorial comment,

> In the method of a Montessori school there is a greater similarity to the method of
> the Catholic Church than is to be found in that of the ordinary type of school. . . .
> The root reason for this similarity of method is not far to seek. It is simply this, that
> they are both based on the same psychology, viz.—that man is a twofold being,
> made up of body and spirit.[56]

As Standing articulates here, Montessori's psychology is "that man is a twofold being,

made up of body and spirit," an assertion rooted in her Catholic Christian faith.[57]

     Although many secularists have historically advocated (and continue to

advocate) for the Montessori method, it must be recognized that this approach is

intricately built upon a Christian theistic foundation.[58] Montessori describes the similarity

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[54] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 6. This has been advocated by individuals such as Gianna Gobbi, *Nurturing the Whole Child: Montessori Principles Applied to the Catechesis of Children*, trans. Rebekah Rojcewicz (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2024); Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child: Experiencing Scripture and Liturgy with Young Children* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1992); and Jerome W. Berryman, *The Complete Guide to Godly Play: How To Lead Godly Play Lessons*, vol. 1 (Denver: Church, 2006). Gobbi and Cavalletti wrote from a Roman Catholic perspective, and Berryman wrote as an Episcopal priest. See https://www.godlyplayfoundation.org/ and https://www.cgsusa.org/.

[55] Standing states in an editorial comment, "It is a curious but undeniable fact that amongst the leading advocates of the Montessori method in America, England, Holland, Austria, Sweden, and Ireland, are to be found converts to Catholicism. It might be supposed that the circumstance was due to a proselytizing zeal on the part of Dr. Montessori. But this can hardly be the case because Dr. Montessori does not, as a rule, touch on the question of religion in her training courses for teachers. On these occasions she confines her lectures to the psychology and practice of her method in general—a procedure, both wise and politic, since her audiences usually consist of members of many different denominations, with no particular interest in religious education." Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 143.

[56] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 154. Whether or not Montessori is perceived as advocating Christianity in a moralistic sense makes little difference. The point here is that her methodology is built upon a Christian theistic framework.

[57] In 1901, life events lead to Montessori's refocus on her faith. Christina de Stefano writes, "The Catholic faith, which up to that time had been simply a part of her culture, becomes a refuge and a new way of looking at life, something that explains and illuminates everything." Christina de Stefano, *The Child Is the Teacher: A Life of Maria Montessori*, trans. Gregory Conti (New York: Other Press, 2022), 69–70.

[58] "The humility and the patience of the mistress; the superior value of deeds over words; the sensorial environment as the beginning of the life of the soul; the silence and recollection obtained from the children; the liberty left to the child soul in striving after perfection; the minute care in preventing and correcting all that is evil, even simple error, or slight imperfection; the control of error by means within the very material for development; the respect shown for the interior life of the child—all were pedagogical principles which seemed to them to emanate from, and to be directly inspired by Catholicism." Montessori,

between the ultimate aim of her method and Christian faith:

> If we consider all these facts together we shall find a striking resemblance to the religious life. A prepared environment, a life of peace, the required concentration for meditation and contemplation, mastery over the body, silence, the same exercises repeated from day to day. The monks have produced the greatest heroes, namely the saints, those who were ready for every strife, struggles against temptation, endurance, martyrdom. Such heroes are not formed by heated speeches, nor by sounding the trumpet of war; on the contrary they have traversed the noiseless road of formation.[59]

This concept of "formation" anticipates both the student's day-to-day development as well as the development achieved in the conclusion of one's education. Of course, to achieve this formation, education must reflect the developmental stage of the individual at a specific given time.

When summarizing Montessori's educational approach, the following definition is most helpful: "If it were necessary to compress the description of the principles of the Montessori method into a single phrase, perhaps the most comprehensive would be that it was a method based on 'Liberty in a Prepared Environment.'"[60] When Montessori refers to "liberty," she refers not to letting students do whatever they want without bounds.[61] On the contrary, she refers to a freedom within

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"The Child in the Church," 2.

[59] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 106–7. About Montessori's faith, Standing articulates the distinction between her approach and the educational approach of Friedrich Froebel. Standing is worth citing at length: "There is one more point of divergence between Montessori and Froebel . . . so fundamental that it is perhaps the cause of all the rest. We refer to the profound difference in what the Germans call the *Weltanschauung* 'world view' held by Montessori and Froebel. Froebel's religious philosophy was very largely pantheistic and Nordic; whereas Montessori's is Catholic and Latin. . . . One thing is clear—it [Froebel's philosophy] is pure pantheism. It is the breaking down of all distinctions and forms, the flowing together of everything in the universe—soul, body, matter, spirit, you and I, God and man—in one great whole. As opposed to this view historical Christianity presents a universe with definite and abiding forms, eternally distinct, and distinct from its Creator. The dogmatic teaching of traditional Christianity, with its doctrine of the Incarnation, of the visible Church with its Sacramental system, of Heaven and Hell, of Spirit and Matter, and many others—all combine to form an objective body of truth, external to the individual, hard as adamant, to be taken for what it is or not at all. The Gospel is essentially the 'good news,' and news is something which comes from the outside, to be accepted and believed—or rejected." Standing, *Maria Montessori*, 350–51.

[60] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 109

[61] "'To let the child do as he likes,' when he has not yet developed any powers of control, is to betray the idea of freedom." Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, Montessori Series 1 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2007), 185.

intentionally defined limits.[62] In this sort of an environment, the teacher serves as an active guide who equips, enables, and encourages the student to pursue learning through natural curiosity and interest driven exploration.

The statement "liberty in a prepared environment" certainly can be further defined and expanded, as it is in chapters 2 and 3. However, this statement does succinctly summarize Montessori's approach to achieve the *telos* of "the formation of man." If Montessori's "liberty in a prepared environment" is suitable to develop "the formation of man" in the education of children, perhaps it is likewise an effective educational mechanism to develop "the formation of man" in adult education, specifically in theological higher education.

### Montessori Approach as School Reform Alternative

Related to the potential adaptation of the Montessori approach to theological higher education is the fact that this method has been considered a viable choice for school reform in general. In his article, "Montessori as a School Reform Alternative Reflecting Biblical Anthropology," Jaeuk Jeong asserts,

> Because of its most accurate description of humanity based on the biblical anthropology, its unified system . . . focusing on producing the right kind of teachers, and its extensive actual implementation in various kinds of reform efforts, *the Montessori Method can be proposed as one of the most feasible school reform alternatives*.[63]

For the Christian educator especially, the Montessori approach is unique among fully developed educational systems. Jeong writes, "Theologically, the Montessori system was built upon the Christian theological anthropology that the main source of failure in our

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[62] To be clear, Montessori is referring to an *educational* liberty. Given the topic of this present thesis, theological education, it is worth nothing that Montessori's "liberty" is not in any way related to the concept of *moral* liberty in a Pelagian sense. For a summary of the Pelagian controversy, see James Barr, "The Pelagian Controversy," *Evangelical Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (October 1949): 253–64; and R. C. Sproul, "The Pelagian Controversy," Ligonier, accessed January 4, 2024, https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/pelagian-controversy.

[63] Jeong, "Montessori as a School Reform Alternative," 323 (emphasis added).

education is humanity's original sin and sins preventing us from fulfilling the Imago Dei."[64] Alair August agrees, "In contrast to that of many educational theorists, Montessori's holistic vision of education is not all that far from what the Christian educator readily embraces."[65] She continues, "Montessori builds on an understanding of theological anthropology that resembles a view to which most evangelical Christians would hold."[66] To Jeong and August, the Montessori approach is closely aligned and congruent with historic Christian anthropology.

For the Christian educator specifically, Montessori's biblical anthropology validates it as a potential means of educational reform. Additionally, for Christian and secular educators alike, Montessori's approach is unique in its potential as a method for school reform due to its all-encompassing nature (involving a unique pedagogy, curriculum, environment, teacher training, etc.) that includes directions for the explicit, hidden, and null curriculums. About this, Jeong writes, "The genius of Montessori lies in her unified system knitting her philosophy into each of her principles and practices."[67] In this way, Montessori is distinct from other educators who have focused primarily on developing theory rather than practice.[68] Jeong continues, "Montessori's real contribution

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[64] Jeong, "Montessori as a School Reform Alternative," 315. Jeong also asserts, "Montessori's understanding of children or humans has its origin from biblical anthropology" (309).

[65] August, "Analysis of the Educational Method of Maria Montessori," 108. August continues by articulating the disagreements: "The orthodox Christian educator will: (1) reject Montessori's assertion that children are capable of learning—especially the gospel message— completely on their own, without the active teaching of an adult (or at the very least, a peer); (2) hold to a similar—though perhaps slightly nuanced—understanding of original sin and its implications for humanity; (3) place a greater focus on the need for conversion/redemption; and (4) recognize the inconsistent hermeneutic with which Montessori often interpreted Scripture. In this way, Montessori's overarching holistic vision can be embraced, while still rejecting some of her conclusions" (109).

[66] August, "Analysis of the Educational Method of Maria Montessori," 116. August notes, "Christians ought to view her educational approach as a thorough and viable option for Christian education" (114).

[67] Jeong, "Montessori as a School Reform Alternative," 311. Jeong continues, "Montessori spent all her lifetime to complete an educational system to bring reform to the traditional education of her days" (312).

[68] "Her system is appraised unique among constructivists' approaches in providing a broad and detailed curriculum for teachers." Jeong, "Montessori as a School Reform Alternative," 311–12. In this way, Montessori "was more a practitioner than a theorist" (321).

is not creation of her new theories but *her* combination of theories and practices, which has effectuated an educational reform mainly through the freedom of the child."[69] For the Christian educator, these two elements—Montessori's distinctly Christian biblical anthropology and her extensive development of educational practice—indicate the potential viability of Montessori education as the methodology of choice for school reform in theological higher education.

**Weaving Two Strands**

When considering school reform, John Hull—following Larry Cuban—distinguishes between *first-* and *second-order* changes.[70] According to Hull, "school transformation does not accrue from a first-order change."[71] Cuban defines these types of changes as follows:

> [First-order changes] try to make what already exists more efficient and more effective, without disturbing the basic organizational features, without substantially altering the ways in which adults and children perform their roles.[72]

> [Second-order changes] alter the fundamental ways in which organizations are put together. They reflect major dissatisfaction with present arrangements. Second-order changes introduce new goals, structures, and roles that transform familiar ways of doing things into new ways of solving persistent problems.[73]

Although there have been seismic shifts in theological higher education over the centuries,[74] many attempts at curricular revision and institutional reform in American

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[69] Jeong, "Montessori as a School Reform Alternative," 321.

[70] Larry Cuban, "A Fundamental Puzzle of School Reform," *Phi Delta Kappan* 69, no. 5 (January 1988): 342.

[71] Hull, "Aiming for Christian Education," 219.

[72] Cuban, "A Fundamental Puzzle of School Reform," 342.

[73] Cuban, "A Fundamental Puzzle of School Reform," 342.

[74] This is especially evident when one considers the developments of theological education since the time of the early church. Gonzáles notes, "Seminaries are a relatively recent invention. They date from the sixteenth century, when they were first established by the Roman Catholic Church. Before that time there were no seminaries." Gonzáles, *Theological Education*, 117. If anything, the initial establishment of seminaries demonstrates a historic instance of a "second-order change" in theological education.

theological higher education appear to have been what Hull and Cuban would refer to as "first-order" changes. The aim of this study, however, is not quite so modest; the aim of this study is to suggest a second-order change to modern theological higher education by appropriating the educational model of Maria Montessori.[75]

In so doing, this study attempts to weave two strands together: (1) current trends in theological higher education, and (2) the possibility of Montessori adult education. Hull's comments are eminently applicable here:

> Christian perspective must reshape and redirect the curriculum, pedagogical theory, student evaluation, educational goals, and school structure—a general concept which includes various mechanisms for controlling student behavior, everything from the way classes are timed and students are grouped to the arrangement of classroom furniture. And this, I maintain, we have yet to do![76]

This study aims to do for seminary education what Hull maintains "we have yet to do!" This is attempted by matching the *telos* of theological education ("the formation of man") with the methodology of Montessori's approach ("liberty in a prepared environment").

## Research Purpose

The purpose of this text-based study is to establish a conceptual framework for redemptive formation in theological higher education by means of appropriating the educational model of Maria Montessori.[77]

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[75] In this way, the present writer would take issue with Hull's conclusion, "I must remain steadfast in my conclusion that no biblical model of education has materialized because of [past educational reformers]." Hull, "Aiming for Christian Education," 210. The educational reformers to which Hull refers include, "educators like Al Green, Geraldine Steensma, Harro Van Brummelen, John Van Dyk, and Nicholas Wolterstorff" (210). In response, this study suggests that Maria Montessori's educational model offers a potentially viable alternative approach to the traditional modern classroom. Of course, again, Montessori writes from a Roman Catholic perspective.

[76] Hull, "Aiming for Christian Education," 207.

[77] In establishing a conceptual framework, this study follows the general methodological approach of Gracilynn Joy Hanson, "Establishing a Framework for Female-Gendered Embodiment in a Redemptive Context," (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), who proposes a definitional framework built on the biblical anthropology of Gregg Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2021). Especially see Hanson's chapter 5, "Establishing a Definitional Framework," 104–60.

## Research Questions

Related to the development of an alternative educational approach to theological higher education, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What aspects of Maria Montessori's educational method, as expressed in her writings, are developmentally appropriate for adult learners?

2. What is a conceptual framework for theological higher education built upon the educational methodology of a Montessori approach?

3. Is the proposed conceptual framework congruent with the teachings of Scripture, according to a historic, orthodox Christian understanding?

4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this proposed conceptual framework of theological higher education that encourages redemptive formation?

## Limitations and Assumptions

This study does not prescribe a particular seminary curriculum. Rather, it envisions an approach—a conceptual framework—that could be adapted by a variety of seminaries with a number of delivery methods (traditional on-campus, hybrid residential, etc.), even as it largely excludes programs that are delivered exclusively online. It must be acknowledged up front that the suggested approach—especially related to campus and classroom design—is not inexpensive, an issue which is of course dependent on an institution's budget and financial resources.

Despite Montessori's Roman Catholicism, this study is intentionally limited to developing a conceptual framework focused on the evangelical Christian seminary.

## Methodological Design

This text-based study is divided into five chapters. In addition to the current introductory chapter, the other chapters include:

Chapter 2, "Engaging Montessori's Educational Model for Adult Learners," analyzes Maria Montessori's primary source writings to articulate her educational model. This chapter attempts to provide a rationale as to why it is developmentally legitimate to adapt this pedagogical method to adult education. It concludes by envisioning initial

suggestions for Montessori adult education in general.

Chapter 3, "Establishing a Conceptual Framework," aims to propose an initial framework for theological higher education that encourages redemptive formation by means of appropriating key elements of Montessori's educational model.

Chapter 4, "Biblically Assessing the Conceptual Framework," analyzes the proposed framework from a historic, orthodox Christian perspective. In so doing, it provides a biblical rationale for and critique of the proposed framework.

Chapter 5, "Conclusion," examines the advantages and disadvantages of this proposed framework for theological higher education. This chapter discusses potential implications of this framework as well as potential avenues for further research.

## Conclusion

In appropriating Montessori's educational method to theological higher education, the goal of this study is to provide a potentially viable educational approach that encourages the formation of man. Toward this end, the following conceptual framework will be proposed and considered in the chapters that follow: *Theological higher education that encourages redemptive formation prioritizes the student's liberty by intentionally preparing the environment beautifully, age-appropriately, for independence, for spiritual enrichment, and to replicate practical life.* This may be summarized concisely with Montessori's phrase, "liberty in a prepared environment."

CHAPTER 2

ENGAGING MONTESSORI'S EDUCATIONAL
MODEL FOR ADULT LEARNERS

There is a significant gap in the literature regarding the implementation of the

Montessori method for adult education, particularly formal higher education. Since this

study aims to adapt Montessori's educational approach for adult learners in theological

higher education, it first must be demonstrated that it is developmentally appropriate to

attempt doing so. This chapter attempts to provide a rationale as to why it is legitimate to

adapt Montessori's approach to adult education in general, prior to establishing a

framework for redemptive formation in theological higher education in chapter 3.

**The Possibility of Montessori Adult Higher Education**

It is true that some have attempted to adapt Maria Montessori's principles to

specific adult contexts in select ways. Success has been found with dementia patients in

long-term care homes,[1] as well as among those with learning disabilities[2] and those

attempting second language acquisition.[3] Some employers have attempted to use

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[1] See, among many studies, Michelle S. Bourgeois et al., "Join the Revolution: How Montessori for Aging and Dementia Can Change Long-Term Care Culture," *Seminars in Speech and Language* 36 (2015): 209–14; Cameron J. Camp, "Origins of Montessori Programming for Dementia," *Nonpharmacol Ther Dement.* 1, no. 2 (2010): 163–74. Additionally, the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) has a division related to the study of implementing the Montessori method with dementia patients, entitled, "Montessori for Dementia and Ageing," accessible at www.montessoridementia.org.

[2] Fabrizio Boldrini, ed., *Montessori Method for Orienting and Motivating Adults: Guide for the Application of the Montessori Method to Adult Education* (Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union, 2015). This study states, "The results of the project experimentation and the following indications for educators, including the practical educative exercises contained in this publication, intend to contribute to increase the participation of adults with social needs in the formal education" (7).

[3] There have been several studies on this topic (most of which were based in Europe) including Medine Güney et. al., *Guide for the Application of the Montessori Method to Teaching 2nd Language in Adult Education* (Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, 2019); and Alina Doroch, *Research on Montessori Education and the Learning Methods for Adults in Poland: The Polish National Report*

Montessori principles in the design of their workplace environments,[4] and (perhaps most surprisingly) it has even been suggested that law schools might utilize key Montessori principles in their curriculum.[5] There have been, however, no comprehensive attempts to validate the adaptation of the Montessori method to the adult learner.

Several educators have recognized the need for adapting the Montessori approach to late adolescent and adult learners. Chloë Marshall, for example, writes, "Although some Montessori schools take pupils up to the age of 18, they are few and far between, and to my knowledge there are no published evaluations of their effectiveness."[6] She continues by noting that this demographic (specifically late adolescents, ages 12–18) "is an area where current Montessorians might be able to take over the reins."[7] In a similar vein, Robert Gardner suggests, "Increasingly Dr. Montessori's observations are being employed in secondary schools. . . . In fact, her ideas could well be employed in the university system where students are often isolated in an arid world of abstract lectures."[8] This is readily admitted on a popular level by Montessori educators. For examples, Lori Bourne writes, "I don't know of any definitive studies showing that Montessori works (or doesn't work) with adults."[9]

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(Poland: The National Research on Montessori Method, 2013).

[4] These concepts are found in a number of popular level sources. For example, see Barbara Atkinson, "How The Montessori Method Applies to Today's Workplace," Medium, April 14, 2017, https://medium.com/taking-note/how-the-montessori-method-applies-to-todays-workplace-419c37f719fa. Also, see Sophie Bryan, "Could Montessori Be the Answer for a Better Workplace?" TEDx, August 24, 2018, YouTube video, 14:18, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgnlhBI7xVY.

[5] Emily Grant, "The Pink Tower Meets the Ivory Tower: Adapting Montessori Teaching Methods for Law School," *Arkansas Law Review* 68, no. 3 (2015): 603–67.

[6] Chloë Marshall, "Montessori Education: A Review of the Evidence Base," *NPJ Science of Learning* 2, no. 11 (2017): 7. Marshall continues, "Developing a Montessori education for this group in conjunction with the best of our knowledge of developmental cognitive neuroscience has the potential to make a very positive contribution" (7).

[7] Marshall, "Montessori Education," 7.

[8] Robert Gardner, "The Maria Montessori No One Knows: A Heartbreaking Betrayal—Part 1 of 2," Our Kids, accessed January 10, 2024, https://www.ourkids.net/school/the-maria-montessori-no-one-knows.

[9] Lori Bourne, "The Montessori Method for Adults," Montessori for Everyone, accessed April

The goal of this chapter, therefore, is to attempt to fill this void by providing a rationale as to why, developmentally, it is legitimate to adapt the Montessori approach to adult education. This is attempted by considering the *telos* of Montessori education along with Maria Montessori's concept of human development. If, as demonstrated in chapter 1, "the formation of man" is the goal of a complete Montessori education, then perhaps it is valid—even *necessary*—to envision how this approach might be extrapolated to adult learners.

## Montessori's Planes of Human Development

As previously cited in chapter 1, the *telos* of Montessori's approach is perhaps most succinctly summarized as "the formation of man." She writes, "If 'the formation of man' becomes the basis of education, then the coordination of all schools from infancy to maturity, from nursery to university, arises as a first necessity: for man is a unity, an individuality that passes through interdependent phases of development."[10] To achieve this goal, the methodology of Montessori education is perhaps best summarized by the statement, "liberty in a prepared environment."[11] To Montessori, "the formation of man" is attempted by uniquely preparing the environment in such a way that is developmentally appropriate for each developmental stage.

Montessori understood there to be four essential planes of human development around which formal education should be constructed:[12] infancy (0–6),[13] childhood (6–

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21, 2023, https://www.blog.montessoriforeveryone.com/montessori-method/the-montessori-method-for-adults/.

[10] Maria Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, Montessori Series 12 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2007), 80.

[11] Maria Montessori, "The Child in the Church," in *Montessori: On Religious Education*, ed. Maria Montessori and E. M. Standing (Lake Ariel, PA: Hillside Education, 2020), 109.

[12] Maria Montessori, *Citizen of the World: Key Montessori Readings*, Montessori Series 14 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2019). The particular chapter of focus is entitled, "The Four Planes of Education." It first appeared as a lecture given by Montessori in 1938 in Edinburgh.

[13] "The first phase of the child's development goes from birth to . . . six years of age."

12),[14] adolescence (12–18),[15] and maturity (18–24 +).[16] Although these planes may be subdivided, these four do provide a helpful, if basic, general framework from which to understand Montessori's concept of human development.[17] To Montessori—who based her pedagogical approach on empirically observable changes in children—these planes summarize key life stages of biological development.[18] Each plane "has its own particular needs" specific to it alone,[19] which, in turn, demands an adjustment in the preparation of the environment.

**First Plane: Infancy**

In the infancy plane (which can be divided into two sub-planes),[20] the child age 0 to 6 is characterized by a mind that absorbs vast quantities of information and is focused on that which is concrete.[21] Children in this plane require "an environment proportionate to the size and intelligence of the children, where they could work and

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Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 28.

[14] "The one that follows may be called the second phase of childhood." Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 31.

[15] "The third phase begins with adolescence and it requires a third plane of education." Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 35.

[16] "Beyond this phase there is one that should correspond to the orthodox university. . . . This is the last stage, or the fourth plane of education." Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 37.

[17] "With regard to the child, education should correspond to these stages, so that instead of dividing the schools into nursery, primary, secondary and university, we should divide education in planes and each of these should correspond to the phase the developing individual is going through." Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 28.

[18] "It is something similar to passing from the larval to nymph-stage in insects. The two stages are completely different. Each lasts a period of time, each has its own needs and mode of behaviour." Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 28.

[19] Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 27. Montessori also states, "Our method has been based on the fact that we have been guided by the manifestations of children at different phases of growth. Each of these may be considered a level or a plane" (27).

[20] "There are two sub phases, from birth to three and three to six." Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, Montessori Series 1 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2007), 15.

[21] "The child has a mind able to absorb knowledge. He has the power to teach himself." Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 3.

achieve independence."[22] The environment is specifically tailored to the developmental needs of this age, with child-sized furniture and age-appropriate learning materials. Additionally, the environment is intentionally domestic in that it replicates home life: "And what do the children do? It is what one does in one's own house. They carry out work which has a practical aim, they sweep, dust, dress themselves, etc."[23] Montessori comments, "We call our schools 'Children's House' and in them the children are the masters of the house."[24] The environment is specifically prepared to provoke spontaneous activity.

**Second Plane: Childhood**

In the second plane of development, the child age 6 to 12 "develops feelings towards the abstract, just as in the first phase he had feelings towards the concrete."[25] The environment needed for this phase of the child's development builds upon the domestic elements of the first plane but extends further into society, reflecting the child's growing cognizance of life outside the family (or "attitude of detachment from the home environment").[26] About this, Montessori notes, "The environment of the previous phase, a house furnished with small furniture and beautiful things, is no longer adequate or satisfying. . . . He requires to go out into the world to make wider contacts with both nature and human society."[27] For this stage, the environment must expand beyond that of

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[22] Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 28.

[23] Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 29.

[24] Maria Montessori, *The Child, Society and the World*, Montessori Series 7 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2016), 6.

[25] Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 32. To Montessori, this change is not just internal, but external as well: "The pearly teeth of the little child fall out, they are replaced by large, strong, deeply rooted teeth; the curly hair becomes straighter and darker; the fat chubby body becomes gawky and thinner. The sweetness of character gives way to a certain hardness, so much so, that this phase of life which continues till adolescence, has been called the age of rudeness" (31).

[26] Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 32.

[27] Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 32–33. She continues, "It is not enough to provide material for the child to work in school. He demands to go out into the world . . . he requires to explore the physical

the infancy plane to include opportunities for learning outside the walls of the classroom.

**Third Plane: Adolescence**

The third plane is characteristic of those age 12 to 18, where the adolescent develops further feelings toward the abstract. During this plane "A totally different psychology now distinguishes the individual."[28] Montessori notes, "It is in this stage that 'vocation' and 'militancy' occur. These children want to make a direct contribution to society and have it recognized."[29] As with the previous two planes, due to this developmental shift, the environment must be adjusted accordingly: "The child should no longer be restricted to the environment of the school, to the vaster environment in which he learned and understood the how and the why, nor be so close to the family from which he depends financially; he wants 'to live' society. He should go farther away."[30] It is during this stage that Montessori advocates for what she refers to as *Erdkinder* ("land children"),[31] who live and work on the land, often in agricultural settings. She writes, "He should work a great deal on the land as well as continue with guided studies."[32] In all things, Montessori makes clear, "The adolescent must never be treated as a child, for that is a stage of life that he has surpassed."[33] The individual in this plane must have the

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world and society" (33).

[28] Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 35. She continues, "He passes from feeling for himself in relation with those with whom he is in contact, to feeling for others whom he has never seen. It is an abstract love" (35).

[29] Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 35.

[30] Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 35–36.

[31] Montessori's essay, "Erdkinder," is reproduced in her book, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, as "Appendix A," 56–67. Here, she asserts, "Schools as they are today, are adapted neither to the needs of adolescence nor to the times in which we live" (*From Childhood to Adolescence*, 56). In her proposal, Montessori writes, "We have called these children the 'Erdkinder' because they are learning about civilization through its origin in agriculture. They are the 'land-children'" (65).

[32] Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 36.

[33] Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 69.

opportunity to contribute in worthwhile ways, learning the basics of trade and vocation.[34]

In this way the environment is specially designed to match the developmental stage of the adolescent.[35]

**Fourth Plane: Maturity**

In the fourth plane, the now-adult age 18 to 24 (and beyond) has developed to the mature stage, complete with all the rights and responsibilities thereof.[36] Montessori writes, "He should be as a live spark and aware of the open gate to the potentialities of prospective human life and of his own possibilities and responsibilities."[37] If his life's education has been effective thus far, he is ever closer to Montessori's vision of the formed man: "All the good of all the ages must have been absorbed and surpassed."[38] This being recognized, Montessori is clear that "Education should continue throughout life."[39] Despite her presentation of the adult plane, Montessori articulates little of what the prepared environment entails for the adult learner, nor of what adult education ought to look like in a formal setting.

**Summary of Montessori's Four Planes**

Montessori's planes of development, along with the necessary change in educational environment, are summarized below:

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[34] "I think that adolescents should not only work but also receive payment for their work. . . . Self-respect should be gained for the seriousness of work done and a realisation of what work and money mean." Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 36.

[35] When commenting on Montessori's youth settlement ideas of the *Erdkinder*, E. M. Standing states, "The new 'prepared environment' . . . corresponds to this stage." E. M. Standing, *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work* (New York: Plume, 1957), 117.

[36] "The child is in a continual state of growth and metamorphosis, whereas the adult has reached the norm of the species." Montessori, as recorded in Standing, *Maria Montessori*, 106.

[37] Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 37.

[38] Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 37.

[39] Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 37.

Table 1. Montessori's human development stages

| | Developmental Characteristics | Educational Environment | Educational Materials | Educational Tasks |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Infancy (0–6) | The infant is characterized by a mind that absorbs vast quantities of information and is focused on that which is concrete. | "An environment proportionate to the size and intelligence of the children, where they could work and achieve independence" (Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 28). | Child-sized furniture and didactic materials to complete practical, domestic-type activities such as preparing food and cleaning. | "The children do . . . what one does in one's own house. They carry out work which has a practical aim, they sweep, dust, dress themselves, etc." (Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 29). |
| Childhood (6–12) | The child "develops feelings towards the abstract, just as in the first phase he had feelings towards the concrete" (Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 32). | "The environment of the previous phase, a house furnished with small furniture and beautiful things is no longer adequate or satisfying" (Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 32). | The environment must expand beyond that of the infancy plane to include opportunities for learning outside the walls of the classroom. | "He requires to go out into the world to make wider contacts with both nature and human society" (Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 33). |
| Adolescence (12–18) | "A totally different psychology now distinguishes the individual. . . . These children want to make a direct contribution to society and have it recognized" (Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 35). | "We have called these children the '*Erdkinder*' because they are learning about civilization through its origin in agriculture. They are the 'land-children'" (Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 65). They live and work in agricultural settings. | The adolescent's role is to learn to contribute to society. He should not be "so close to the family from which he depends financially; he wants 'to live' society" (Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 35–36). | The adolescent "should work a great deal on the land as well as continue with guided studies" (Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 36). "The adolescent must never be treated as a child, for that is a stage of life that he has surpassed" (Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 69). |
| Maturity (12–24 +) | "All the good of all the ages must have been absorbed and surpassed" (Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 37). | Not articulated. | Not articulated. | "Education should continue throughout life" (Montessori, *Citizen of the World*, 37). |

Throughout Montessori's four planes of development, she argues that the environment must continuously adjust and change to match the developmental needs of each specific age. In this way, the principle of the "prepared environment" remains

constant despite the fact that preparation looks quite distinct at various points. It is true that at each plane the environment ought to replicate real life. Yet this, of course, begs the question of what element of life ought to be replicated. During *infancy*, this looks like a home filled with toddler-sized furniture and didactic learning materials. During *childhood*, this looks like the home augmented with the child's initial emergence into wider society. During *adolescence*, this looks like an agricultural workplace where the child begins to learn the initial competencies necessary for a trade. By the *maturity* stage, there is little need to replicate life, however, as life may simply be incorporated into the educational environment. Yet this again raises the question of what a Montessori adult education would entail, especially regarding the educational environment and learning materials.

## The Necessity of Envisioning Montessori Adult Education

At various points throughout her writings, Montessori makes clear the need for adult education built on her pedagogical principles. For instance, in her book *The Formation of Man*, she writes, "Many people have come to the conclusion that Montessori Universities are a necessity."[40] She queries, "What exactly, then, is the Method, which begins with newborn babies and extends to undergraduates? Other methods have not so wide a function."[41] Yet even as Montessori herself recognized the need for Montessori adult education, never did she comprehensively develop how this might look in her published works.[42] She does, however, make the strong distinction

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[40] Maria Montessori, *The Formation of Man*, Montessori Series 3 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2007), 4. Montessori notes that although her method was "originally worked out for pre-primary education, it has now infiltrated into the primary and secondary stages—even into the University" (4). Which universities, though, she does not specify, nor are studies available that document this development.

[41] Montessori, *Formation of Man*, 5.

[42] Despite the voluminous nature of Montessori's writings, she wrote surprisingly little on formal adult education—the most significant document is perhaps her short essay, "Functions of the University," which is reproduced in Maria Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, Montessori Series 12 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2007), as "Appendix C," 78–89.

between the educational setting of children and adults, between the *school* and the *university*.[43] She writes, "Among educational institutions we can clearly distinguish two categories of schools: one for children and adolescents, another, the university, which is meant for adults."[44]

To Montessori, the incorporation of the same pedagogy from one stage to another is illegitimate, as this would violate the distinction between the planes of development (as above). The *school* ought to be fundamentally distinct from the *university*. She argues, "To think of Lycea [pre-university schools] using the Fröbel [kindergarten] method would be clearly nonsensical. To advocate Nursery School Methods in the University would be equally so."[45] Montessori's biographer, Standing, clarifies this further:

> Because the child is almost a different being at different stages in life we cannot have just one set of education principles for every period. We cannot expect that those methods which were used with success in the first stage—i.e., the age which most people would think of in connection with the name Montessori school—could be applied, without modification, in the next.[46]

Montessori's (and Standing's) point is that the Montessori method can only be legitimately adapted to a different developmental plane if—and only *if*—it is modified in such a way that is developmentally appropriate.

In light of Montessori's own writings, however, it appears that a genuinely Montessorian adult education is not only possible, but fundamentally necessary. In the strikingly clear statement quoted earlier regarding the aims and goals of this method, Montessori writes, "If 'the formation of man' becomes the basis of education, then the

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[43] "There is, however, one principle which—according to Montessori herself—may be regarded as more fundamental than any other; probably because, in a sense, it includes all the rest. It is this: *that we must constantly bear in mind the fundamental difference between the child and the adult.*" Standing, *Maria Montessori*, 106.

[44] Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 80.

[45] Montessori, *Formation of Man*, 5.

[46] Standing, *Maria Montessori*, 115.

coordination of all schools from infancy to maturity, from nursery to university, arises as a first necessity."[47] The point here is this, if "the formation of man" is in fact the *telos* of Montessori education (as above), then a Montessori adult education that seeks this formation is more than valid; it is "a first necessity." The goal of the remainder of this chapter, therefore, is to envision what Montessori adult education might look like in such a way that is authentically Montessorian in nature.[48]

## Montessori's Educational Approach Envisioned for Adult Learners

As stated earlier, the Montessori method advocates a unique vision of the role of the teacher, a certain view of the student, and the necessity of a uniquely prepared environment. Montessori defines a school as a "prepared environment in which the child, set free from undue adult intervention, can live its life according to the laws of its development."[49] According to Montessori, her method may be summarized in the statement, "Help given in order that the human personality may achieve its independence."[50] This independence, of course, demands a certain perspective and pedagogy based on the student, environment, and teacher.

This unique view of the student, environment, and teacher constitutes what is often referred to either as the Montessori "trinity"[51] or the "triad,"[52] as each of these

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[47] Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 80.

[48] This appears quite in line with what Montessori wrote in her 1912 translation of *The Montessori Method*: "It is my hope that, starting from the individual study of the child educated with our method, other educators will set forth the results of their experiments. These are the pedagogical books which await us in the future." Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2002), 374.

[49] Standing, *Maria Montessori*, 118. This is a direct quote from Montessori in Standing's biography.

[50] Montessori, *Formation of Man*, 6.

[51] Angeline S. Lillard and Virginia McHugh, "Authentic Montessori: The Dottoressa's View at the End of Her Life Part I: The Environment," *Journal of Montessori Research* 5, no. 1 (2019): 3.

[52] Marshall, "Montessori Education," 1. About the "triad," Marshall comments, "Central to Montessori's method of education is the dynamic triad of child, teacher, and environment" (1).

elements is really inseparable from the others. Lillard and McHugh summarize, "In Montessori theory, the essential elements of education for human development comprise setting children free in a prepared environment with a specially trained teacher."[53] For an authentic Montessori experience, each element of this triad is vital. Standing describes the interconnectedness of Montessori education:

> In giving an account of the Montessori system it is difficult to know where to begin, because it is hard to single out one principle as more important than the others. In an organism all organs are essential, for each plays a necessary part in the whole. And so it is in the Montessori system. . . . What would be the value, for instance, of the "prepared environment" without the "directress" as the link between it and the children? Of what avail the principle of nonintervention of the teacher without at the same time giving the children liberty? Or again how would it be possible to give this liberty without the prepared environment? and so on.[54]

In an effort to envision initial suggestions for Montessori adult education, this study presents an overview of each element of the Montessori triad in an effort to consider how this approach might look.

**The Student: Liberty**

Perhaps the best way to understand Montessori's vision of the student (specifically the child) and her model of education is in contrast to traditional methods: "The old education laid emphasis on teaching by the teacher and learning by the learner. The Montessori Method lays emphasis on observation and discovery by the child."[55] In Montessori's approach, the child is understood as one who will naturally learn if placed in the right environment, with self-correcting learning materials: "Our didactic material renders auto-education possible."[56] Why? Because the child is naturally drawn to play with these objects, which provide correction of their own nature (e.g., shapes that will

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[53] Lillard and McHugh, "Authentic Montessori," 3.

[54] Standing, *Maria Montessori*, 105–6.

[55] Maria Montessori, *What You Should Know about Your Child*, Montessori Series 4 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2007), 93.

[56] Montessori, *The Montessori Method*, 174.

only fit in corresponding holes). In this way, what is essential to auto-education is the child's liberty and freedom, within specified boundaries.

Montessori describes the fundamental basis of her approach: "the liberty of the pupils in their spontaneous manifestations."[57] And again: "No one can be free unless he is independent."[58] To Montessori, students learn best when they are free to study what they want to study. To Montessori, this freedom is never without intentionality or without bounds. As she notes, "'To let the child do as he likes,' when he has not yet developed any powers of control, is to betray the idea of freedom."[59] This concept of "liberty," then, closely relates to the prepared environment and the teacher's guidance toward a specific educational end.

Much of this understanding of liberty and freedom for the student can be adapted to the adult learner. Some practical ways this could be appropriated include:

1. *Auto-education*: Is the student encouraged to learn on his or her own?[60]

2. *Institutional Curriculum*: Does the student have freedom in subjects studied?

3. *Course Curriculum*: Within a subject, is the student free to select topics of interest?

4. *Observation*: Is the student provided the chance to experience discovery firsthand?

5. *Work and Study*: Is the student provided opportunities to work with his or her hands?

6. *Practical Life*: Does the student have the chance to engage with real life situations?

7. *Spiritual Development*: Is the student given the opportunity to develop holistically?

8. *Success*: Is the student given the tools to achieve measurable success?[61]

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[57] Montessori, *The Montessori Method*, 80.

[58] Montessori, *The Montessori Method*, 95. Montessori continues, "Any pedagogical action, if it is to be efficacious in the training of little children, must tend to *help* the children to advance upon this road of independence" (97).

[59] Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 185. Previously cited in chapter 1.

[60] Certain courses and topics are undoubtedly better suited for auto-education than others. This is not meant to suggest that auto-education should be the exclusive method of teaching the adult learner.

[61] "Being active with one's own hands, having a determined practical aim to reach, is what really gives inner discipline." Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 83.

Although these are just initial suggestions for developing the idea of liberty for the adult learner, central to each is the concept that the student ought to be given freedom and independence in his or her educational endeavors. In summary, what is characteristic about the Montessori adult learner? The adult learner ought to be given liberty.

**The Environment: Prepared**

When describing the Montessori classroom environment, Anthony and Benson provide a helpful and articulate summary, "The Montessori educational environment is a wall-to-wall totality in which every object, every piece of furniture, even the decor itself, is the product of careful preparation and thought-out design. Furthermore, the environment provides an open atmosphere of freedom tempered with structure and order."[62] In Montessori education, every aspect of the classroom environment must be intentionally prepared for a purpose. This is so because, as Montessori notes, "The 'Children's House' is the *environment* which is offered to the child that he may be given the opportunity of developing his activities."[63] In other words, the environment is specific to encourage the student's pursuit of his or her own interests, in a guided setting. The environment is intentionally crafted in such a way that students can learn independently and make discoveries on their own: "Our little ones have the impression of continually 'making discoveries' in the world about them; and in this they find the greatest joy."[64] As such, the environment is intentionally prepared for the purpose of providing the student liberty that will result in self-directed learning. As Montessori states, "In our schools the environment itself teaches the children."[65]

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[62] Michael J. Anthony and Warren S. Benson, *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education: Principles for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 351.

[63] Maria Montessori, *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook: A Short Guide to Her Ideas and Materials* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), 37.

[64] Montessori, *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook*, 130.

[65] Maria Montessori, *The Child in the Family*, Montessori Series 8 (Amsterdam: Montessori-

About the prepared environment, Montessori writes, "The first reform in education must be to offer a wider environment and to multiply the possibilities of association and of activity."[66] In some ways, the environment is so closely related to the curriculum that it is almost indistinguishable. For the child, the classroom environment is reproduced to be like a home, yet for the adult, the environment must go beyond this. It ought to reproduce the context of what the student seeks to learn. In this way, the business student ought not merely learn in a classroom but in a functioning and successful business, just as the carpenter ought to learn not solely by lecture, but by using his own hands in the workshop. This could be said for a myriad of vocations: the fisherman learns best on the boat, the pastor learns best in the church, and the nurse best in the hospital. By no means is this to say that the classroom itself is not useful—it certainly is!—but if the adult is to effectively learn, then the environment must be intentionally prepared. As Montessori summarizes, "This does not imply that environment is the *cause* of the growth; it is rather the means towards it."[67]

To Montessori, who sought "the formation of man," the prepared environment is always a place of beauty: "The child should live in an environment of beauty."[68] She endeavored to create a location where one's thoughts would rise to the transcendence of the Creator God,[69] both through the student's exposure to nature as well as through the quality of the campus facilities:[70] "One of our aims was to help the child, by making him

Pierson, 2007), 61.

[66] Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 84.

[67] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 110.

[68] Maria Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood*, Montessori Series 22 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2017), 183.

[69] "The first step was 'to prepare the place' for the little ones, that is the Chapel, which had to be the most beautiful room in the house." Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 5.

[70] "This kind of school is not of a fixed type, but may vary according to the financial resources at disposal and to the opportunities afforded by the environment." Montessori, *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook*, 37.

observe created things, to raise his thoughts to their Creator."[71] Furthermore, the prepared environment is a place wherein students experience unique social development as they work independently in a community of learning.[72] Montessori is worth quoting at length here, "What we all desire for ourselves, namely, not to be disturbed in our work, not to find hindrances to our efforts, to have good friends ready to help us in times of need, to see them rejoice with us, to be on terms of equality with them, to be able to confide and trust in them—this is what we need for happy companionship."[73] This concept of a community of students who learn independently—*together*—is foundational to her approach.

Some practical ways that the idea of an intentionally prepared environment may be adapted to the adult learner include:

1. *Beautiful Campus*: Is the campus and classroom environment of substantive quality?
2. *Off-campus Opportunities*: Are there opportunities for learning outside the school?
3. *Surrounded by Nature*: Is the student encouraged to enjoy the beauty of nature?
4. *Developmentally Appropriate*: Are the classrooms structured to encourage learning?
5. *Learning Materials*: Are the learning materials (books?) easily accessible?
6. *Learning with Peers*: Do students have a chance to learn from peers?
7. *Community Living*: Are there ample spaces on campus for communal experiences?

Montessori provides the following illustration to articulate the importance of the prepared environment, especially regarding the formation of man as the aim of

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[71] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 22.

[72] "[Traditional teachers] cannot understand how social behaviour is fostered in a Montessori school. They think it offers scholastic material but not social material. They say, 'If the child does everything on his own, what becomes of social life?' But what is social life if not the solving of social problems, behaving properly and pursuing aims acceptable to all? To them, social life consists in sitting side by side and hearing someone else talk: but that is just the opposite. The only social life that children get in the ordinary schools is during playtime or on excursions. Ours live always in an active community." Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 203.

[73] Montessori, *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook*, 132–3.

education: "What do the monks do? They remain in that prepared environment day after day; now these same principles can be applied to the entire psychic life for the training of character. If man be a unity, his path must be equally so. In the inner life there is also unity."[74] In summary, what is characteristic about the environment suitable for the adult student? It is beautifully prepared to encourage self-directed study and holistic learning.

**The Teacher: Guide**

In Montessori education, the teacher (for children, often "the directress") is the one who intentionally prepares the environment in such a way that encourages auto-education. About this role, Montessori states, "The teacher has thus become a *director* of the spontaneous work of the children."[75] In other words, the teacher is more of a guide or facilitator than he or she is in the traditional school. For childhood education, this often involves minimal verbal communication. Montessori states,

> We discovered that education is not something which the teacher does, but that it is a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being. It is not acquired by listening to words, but in virtue of experiences in which the child acts on his environment. The teacher's task is not to talk, but to prepare and arrange a series of motives for cultural activity in a special environment for the child.[76]

For Montessori, the teacher's aim is to assist the child in self-directed learning through the preparation of specific learning activities. She writes, "It is necessary for the teacher to *guide* the child without letting him feel her presence too much, so that she may be always ready to supply the desired help, but may never the obstacle between the child and his experience."[77] And again, "The instructions of the teacher consist then merely in a hint, a touch—enough to give a start to the child. The rest develops itself."[78] Regarding

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[74] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 107.

[75] Montessori, *The Montessori Method*, 371.

[76] Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 5.

[77] Montessori, *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook*, 131.

[78] Montessori, *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook*, 59.

the personal characteristics of the teacher, Montessori comments, "Let us seek to implant in the soul the self-sacrificing spirit of the scientist with the reverent love of the disciple of Christ, and we shall have prepared the *spirit* of the teacher."[79] If the teacher aims for the formation of man, he or she must also be formed and spiritually prepared.

Some practical ways that Montessori's concept of the teacher as guide can be adapted to the adult learner include:

1. *Characteristics of the Teacher*: Is the teacher self-sacrificing in all interactions?

2. *Preparation of the Environment*: Does the teacher design effective learning activities?

3. *Observation*: Is the teacher patient to watch as the student learns on their own?

4. *Lectures*: Although often necessary and helpful, is lecture always best?

5. *Assignments*: Do the students have liberty in assignment choice?

6. *Evaluation*: Does the teacher aim to form the student holistically?

Regarding this specific role of the teacher, Montessori offers the illustration:

> You cannot educate directly . . . any more than you can make silk directly. In the latter case all you can do is to place the silkworm in its right environment, give it the right kind of food and *leave it to its own spontaneous activity*; in time it will spin its silken cocoon. So with the child. You can give it the right environment and the right intellectual food—but the active work of education must be the spontaneous exercise of the child's own faculties.[80]

Perhaps this is true of the adult learner as well. In summary, what is characteristic about the role of the teacher? The teacher is characterized as guide, facilitator, and encourager.

## Conclusion

The goal of this chapter has been twofold: (1) to suggest that Montessori adult education is a legitimate and authentically Montessorian option, and (2) to consider some initial suggestions regarding what this approach may entail. As demonstrated in chapter 1,

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[79] Montessori, *The Montessori Method*, 13.

[80] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 121.

the aim of Montessori education is "the formation of man," a concept intrinsically related to Montessori's own Christian spirituality. In view of Montessori's planes of development, it has been suggested that Montessori adult education is needed, though is only possible if the typical Montessori elements ("liberty in a prepared environment") are adapted in a developmentally appropriate manner. To achieve the aim, "the formation of man," a Montessori adult education must carefully utilize the triad of student, environment, and teacher; the student must experience liberty in an environment carefully prepared by a guiding teacher. If this happens, perhaps the success that the Montessori method has brought about in childhood education might likewise be experienced in adult education.

Chapter 3 builds upon this chapter and the prior by proposing a framework for redemptive formation ("the formation of man") in theological higher education by means of Montessori's educational approach ("liberty in a prepared environment"). The following conceptual framework will be proposed and considered in chapter 3: *Theological higher education that encourages redemptive formation prioritizes the student's liberty by intentionally preparing the environment beautifully, age-appropriately, for independence, for spiritual enrichment, and to replicate practical life.* Subsequently, chapter 4 will assess this framework from a historic, orthodox Christian perspective as to its congruence with Scripture. Chapter 5, then, considers the advantages and disadvantages of this proposal.

CHAPTER 3

ESTABLISHING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter synthesizes the information from the previous chapters and additional primary source writings from Maria Montessori to develop a conceptual framework for redemptive formation in theological higher education. It builds upon the *telos* of theological education as discussed in chapter 1 ("the formation of man"), the methodology of Montessori education adaptable to adult education from chapter 2 ("liberty in a prepared environment"), and additional specific aspects of Montessori's educational vision to propose the following: *Theological higher education that encourages redemptive formation prioritizes the student's liberty by intentionally preparing the environment beautifully, age-appropriately, for independence, for spiritual enrichment, and to replicate practical life.*

## Montessori's Educational Framework

It is often said that a Montessori classroom has a noticeably distinct feel compared to a traditional classroom. About this, Jacqueline Cossentino describes her first experience as an educational researcher observing a Montessori classroom.[1] She states,

> I was initially baffled to find a classroom that was alien to anything I had known as a student, teacher, or researcher. From the way the classroom was organized—large, carpeted spaces punctuated by low shelves containing meticulously placed trays of "materials"—to the manner in which students and teachers interacted—minimal discourse, usually conducted in whispers—nothing was as it should be, at least not according to the classroom norms with which I was familiar.[2]

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[1] Jacqueline Cossentino, "Ritualizing Expertise: A Non-Montessorian View of the Montessori Method," *American Journal of Education* 111, no. 2 (February 2005): 211–44.

[2] Cossentino, "Ritualizing Expertise," 211–12. Cossentino continues, "Unlike traditional classrooms . . . Montessori teachers rarely act directly on the subject under study. Rather, they act on the

If the Montessori early childhood classroom looks dramatically different than the traditional elementary classroom found in most modern schools, it raises the question as to if this should also be the case with the classroom environment and educational methods of theological higher education. If an individual was to enter the intentionally prepared seminary classroom, should he or she express a thought similar to Cossentino's: "*I was initially baffled to find a classroom that was alien to anything I had known as a student, teacher, or researcher . . . nothing was as it should be, at least not according to the classroom norms with which I was familiar*"?[3]

In the pages that follow, Montessori's educational approach (often summarized as "liberty in a prepared environment"[4]) is considered in broad terms. The categories below (prepared *beautifully*, *age-appropriately*, *for independence*, *for spiritual enrichment*, and *to replicate practical life*) have been developed based on a synthesis of Montessori's primary source writings. As such, they are artificial—Montessori did not necessarily categorize them as such—and overlap slightly. However, they do provide a helpful framework from which to understand her concept of "liberty in a prepared environment." The aim of this section is not to offer a prescription of how the Montessori method might be employed in its approved setting (early childhood classroom), but rather to elucidate key concepts that might in turn be appropriated to the theological seminary.

environment within which content is subsumed. A Montessori teacher interacts with the environment by preparing it. A Montessori student interacts with his environment by working with materials as prepared by the teacher. And the teacher interacts with the student by first inviting him to work with the materials she has prepared, then protecting his concentration once he has engaged in work. It is the predicable yet unfamiliar manner in which these interactions unfold that can render the 'method' incomprehensible to outsiders" (223–24).

[3] In a similar manner, Malcolm S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton, and Richard A. Swanson describe the initial "culture-shock" that adult students experience when a self-directed approach to adult education (or andragogy) is employed in the classroom. They state, "The adults we work with have by and large not learned to be self-directing inquirers. They have been conditioned to be dependent on teachers to teach them. And so, they often experience a form of culture-shock when first exposed to adult educational programs that require them to participate in the planning." Malcolm S. Knowles, Elwood F. Holton, and Richard A. Swanson, *The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 7th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 116.

[4] Maria Montessori, "The Child in the Church," in *Montessori: On Religious Education*, ed. Maria Montessori and E. M. Standing (Lake Ariel, PA: Hillside Education, 2020), 109.

The second half of this chapter envisions a conceptual framework for theological higher education that encourages redemptive formation based on Montessori's educational framework. Subsequently, chapter 4 assesses this framework from a historic, orthodox Christian perspective to examine congruence with the teachings of Scripture. Chapter 5 then concludes this study by considering the advantages and disadvantages of this conceptual framework.

**Prepared Beautifully**

Throughout her writings, Montessori often developed the concept of the classroom as a beautifully prepared environment, intentionally designed to support the child's natural development.[5] She asserts, "The child should live in an environment of beauty."[6] And again, "The first step was 'to prepare the place' for the little ones, that is the Chapel, which had to be the most beautiful room in the house."[7] This assessment is often made in contrast to the traditional school setting of Montessori's day. The indictment below is representative of Montessori's critique:

> The "hygienic houses" of today with their bare walls and white washable furniture, look like hospitals; while the schools seem like veritable tombs, with their desks ranged in rows like black catafalques—black, merely because they have to be of the same colour as ink to hide the stains which are looked upon as a necessity, just as certain sins and certain crimes are still considered to be inevitable in the world; the alternative of avoiding them has never occurred to anyone. Classrooms have black desks, and bare, gray walls, more devoid of ornament than those of a mortuary chamber; this is to the end that the starved and famishing spirit of the child may "accept" the indigestible intellectual food which the teacher bestows upon it. In other words, every distracting element has to be removed from the environment, so that the teacher, by his oratorical art, and with the help of his laborious expedients, may succeed in fixing the rebellious attention of his pupils on himself.[8]

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[5] "The classroom space and its contents are beautiful, inviting, and systematically organized." Angeline S. Lillard and Virginia McHugh, "Authentic Montessori: The Dottoressa's View at the End of Her Life Part I: The Environment," *Journal of Montessori Research* 5, no. 1 (2019): 4.

[6] Maria Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood*, Montessori Series 22 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2017), 183.

[7] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 5.

[8] Maria Montessori, *The Advanced Montessori Method*, Montessori Series 9 (Amsterdam:

One of Montessori's primary criticisms of the traditional classroom is that "every distracting element has to be removed from the environment." As such, there is nothing beautiful or aesthetically pleasing left. Why? For the sake of utility, to hide stains, and to attempt to fix the student's attention on the teacher. About this, Montessori does not mince words: These schools are "like veritable tombs" and are "more devoid of ornament than those of a mortuary chamber."

Standing in stark contrast to the traditional school is the "prepared environment."[9] In Montessori's prepared environment, the objects within ought to be both practically useful and aesthetically pleasing. To Montessori, these characteristics are not mutually exclusive. She writes, "We may say that the place best adapted to the life of man is an artistic environment; and that, therefore, if we want the school to become 'a laboratory for the observation of human life,' we must gather within it things of *beauty*."[10] When she speaks of "things of beauty," Montessori includes objects such as furniture, pottery, tables, and eating utensils.[11] With the inclusion of quality objects in a beautiful environment, along with enjoying natural beauty, Montessori comments, "One of our aims was to help the child, by making him observe created things, to raise his thoughts to their Creator."[12] In this way, the preparation of the environment *beautifully* serves to evoke a recognition of and dependence on the transcendent Creator.

To be clear, Montessori does not equate "things of beauty" with "things of luxury." In fact, the artistic beauty of which Montessori writes is often best described as

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Montessori-Pierson, 2016), 110.

[9] "One of the teacher's roles is to guide the child through what Montessori termed the 'prepared environment,' i.e., a classroom and a way of learning that are designed to support the child's intellectual, physical, emotional and social development through active exploration, choice, and independent learning." Chloë Marshall, "Montessori Education: A Review of the Evidence Base," *NPJ Science of Learning* 2, no. 11 (2017): 1.

[10] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 110.

[11] For example, see Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 109, 113–14.

[12] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 22.

*simplicity*. About the classroom, Montessori comments, "What is above all essential is, that it be 'artistically beautiful.' In this case beauty is not produced by superfluity or luxury, but by grace and harmony of the line and colour, combined with that absolute simplicity necessitated by the lightness of the furniture."[13] In this way, the prepared environment is intentionally designed to evoke emotions to make one feel as if they are in a *home*. Montessori comments,

> It was therefore a delightful undertaking . . . to make careful inquiries into the rustic local art of the past, and to give it new life by reproducing, in the furniture of the 'Children's Houses,' the forms and colours of tables, chairs, sideboards, and pottery, the designs of textiles and the characteristic decorative motives to be met with in old country-houses.[14]

The beauty Montessori sought to replicate in her schools was reminiscent of "old country-houses." As one who worked in the slums of Italy with disadvantaged children, Montessori surely recognized the need for economic frugality. She writes, "In our schools we recommend the use of 'light' furniture, which is correspondingly simple and economical in the extreme."[15]

To Montessori, both the classroom and the objects within the classroom must serve their purpose; they must be *practical*. Yet they must be more than merely practical; they must also be aesthetically *beautiful*. According to Montessori, the classroom ought to be an "artistic environment" filled with "things of beauty."[16] It ought to be contextualized to its location by including "rustic local art of the past" and being decorated in the style of "old country-houses."[17] Yet even in its aesthetic beauty, it ought

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[13] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 108–9. When Montessori writes of "lightness of the furniture," her point is that the furniture ought to weigh little so that the in the children in class could move it on their own.

[14] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 109.

[15] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 108.

[16] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 110.

[17] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 109.

not be gaudy but rather "simple and economical in the extreme."[18]

Important to note is Montessori's focus on the preparation of the "classroom" and not necessarily the exterior of the campus (at least not to the same extent). Initially, this appears to have been the case due to the location of her "Children's Houses" (*Casa dei Bambini*) in the slums of Rome, as well as limited financial resources. Montessori is worth quoting at length as she reflects on the context and financial situation of her first school:

> Thousands of people [were] crowded in these abandoned buildings. . . . The "Quartiere di San Lorenzo" became known as the shame of Italy. People were too afraid to do anything about it; no one knew what happened within those dark walls. . . . The district, due to its ill-repute, would of course never become a fashionable quarter, therefore only small renovations were necessary to render it habitable for these people already so unfortunate. Regarding it thus as a business venture, they started with one building which they discovered would house a thousand people. They used some whitewash, put in some doors and windows, and laid in a few water pipes and drains. . . .
> The director of the concern decided that the only obvious thing to keep [the children] out of mischief was to collect all the children and confine them.
> One room was set aside for this purpose, resembling in every way a children's prison. It was hoped that a person would be found with enough social courage to tackle the problem. I in my capacity of medical officer of hygiene was approached to take an interest in the work. Having considered the situation I demanded that at least the commonest aids in hygiene, food and sanitation be made available. On the 6th of January 1907 this room was inaugurated to collect the 50 children.[19]

It was in this context that Montessori endeavored to create classrooms of beauty for her students, referred to (again) as "environment[s] of beauty."[20] In later writings, Montessori is not unconcerned with the entire school campus,[21] yet her focus is primarily the classroom where students spend the majority of their time.

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[18] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 108.

[19] Maria Montessori, "The First Casa dei Bambini," Association Montessori Internationale, accessed January 3, 2024, https://montessori150.org/maria-montessori/first-casa-dei-bambini.

[20] Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood*, 183

[21] See Montessori's writings on the Atrium in Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 32–33.

## Prepared Age-Appropriately

Montessori defines a school as a "prepared environment in which the child, set free from undue adult intervention, can live its life according to the laws of its development."[22] According to Montessori, the prepared environment must be designed age-appropriately: "[In the] Children's House . . . children are the masters of the house."[23] Montessori asserts, "One of the most urgent endeavors to be undertaken on behalf of the reconstruction of society is the reconstruction of education. It must be brought about by giving children the environment that is adapted to their nature."[24] She argues, "I have found . . . that it suffices to prepare the environment, adapting to the size of the child."[25] This concept of the environment prepared age-appropriately has already been discussed in chapter 2, especially in regard to the different developmental stages and Montessori's "planes of development."

To Montessori, the traditional classroom is not designed in a developmentally appropriate way for children, but is instead designed primarily for efficiency and industry.[26] One particular element of the classroom that Montessori strongly disdained

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[22] E. M. Standing, *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work* (New York: Plume, 1957), 118. Standing's authorized biography of Montessori includes a number of original quotations credited to Montessori that are not available elsewhere.

[23] Maria Montessori, *Maria Montessori Speaks to Parents: A Selection of Articles*, Montessori Series 21 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2017), 3.

[24] Maria Montessori, *Childhood Education* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1974), 100.

[25] Maria Montessori, *The 1915 California Lectures: Collected Speeches and Writings*, Montessori Series 15 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 1997), 24.

[26] In an often-quoted statement, Montessori describes the dilemma, "Let us imagine ourselves among a race of giants who differ from us in proportion as we differ from the child and we ourselves are forced to use the giant's furniture, dishes and possessions. If we want to sit down, we have to climb on to a chair with our hands and feet. If we want to move the chair, we have to climb down the same way and move this great weight. We want to wash our hands but the wash-basin is like a big bathtub. When we want to empty the basin, it is too big and too heavy to empty it. It takes two hands to use a hairbrush. Everything is so high that we cannot use anything (without asking for help), doors to open, hooks on which to hang our clothes and other things. We are unable to do things we need to do and we feel the humiliation resulting from our failure to act. We certainly would disdain these giant people and not wish to live with them, if we knew they had prepared nothing so we might act. I have found in the *Casa dei Bambini* that it suffices to prepare the environment, adapting to the size of the child, to open the child up to a new social life. Joy and enthusiasm, as well as awakened intelligence result and the children show that providing them with such an environment is a need which must be satisfied." Montessori, *The 1915 California Lectures*, 24–25.

was the formal stationary desk: "The principle of slavery still pervades pedagogy, and therefore, the same principle pervades the school. I need only give one proof—the stationary desks and chairs."[27] Again she writes,

> [In] the public schools . . . the children are repressed in the spontaneous expression of their personality till they are almost like dead beings. In such a school the children, like butterflies mounted on pins, are fastened each to his place, the desk, spreading the useless wings of barren and meaningless knowledge which they have acquired.[28]

Although children should be free to explore and express themselves, Montessori argues that the traditional classroom focuses not on the holistic development of the child but on conformity and quiet obedience.[29]

In contrast, the primary means of instruction in a Montessori classroom comes not through what is typically considered teaching (as in lecturing), but from interacting with the environment and the didactic learning materials prepared in advance by the teacher.[30] In a Montessori classroom, even the furniture ought to be child-sized:

> The surrounding objects should be proportioned to the size and strength of the child: light furniture that he can carry about; low dressers within reach of his arms; locks that he can easily manipulate; chests that run on castors; light doors that he can open and shut readily; clothes-pegs fixed on the walls at a height convenient for him; brushes his little hand can grasp; pieces of soap that can lie in the hollow of such a hand; basins so small that the child is strong enough to empty them; brooms with short, smooth, light handles; clothes he can easily put on and take off himself; these are surroundings which invite activity, and among which the child will gradually perfect his movements without fatigue, acquiring human grace and dexterity, just as

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[27] Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2002), 16.

[28] Montessori, *The Montessori Method*, 14.

[29] "It should be noted that for Montessori the goal of education is to allow the child's optimal development (intellectual, physical, emotional and social) to unfold. This is a very different goal to that of most education systems today, where the focus is on attainment in academic subjects such as literacy and mathematics." Marshall, "Montessori Education," 1.

[30] Even the didactic learning materials must be designed *beautifully*: "The didactic material must be always beautiful, shining and in good repair, with nothing missing, so that it looks new to the child, and is complete and ready for use." Maria Montessori, *Education for a New World*, Montessori Series 5 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2007), 68.

the little kitten acquires its graceful movement and feline dexterity solely under the guidance of instinct.[31]

The Montessori classroom is intended to be most conducive to the child's natural exploration and instinctive learning.

**Prepared for Independence**

Montessori classrooms are designed in such a way that maximizes the child's independence and interest-driven exploration (this is not, however, to the exclusion of learning together with peers in a community environment). According to Montessori, work is the means whereby the child learns best: "The child seeks for independence by means of work; an independence of body and mind."[32] She continues, "Little he cares about the knowledge of others; he wants to acquire a knowledge of his own, to have experience of the world, and to perceive it by his own unaided efforts."[33] To Montessori, firsthand independent experience is vital for the child to learn and develop.[34]

About the child's need for self-directed independent learning, Montessori writes, "The child's first instinct is to carry out his actions by himself, without anyone helping him, and his first conscious bid for independence is made when he defends himself against those who try to do the action for him."[35] As such, the Montessori classroom relies heavily on the teacher's preparation of the environment prior to the students' arrival. Once in the classroom, each student is free to pursue his or her own interests; the teacher serves as a guide who assists when needed. Montessori asserts, "We

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[31] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 113–14.

[32] Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, Montessori Series 1 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2007), 82.

[33] Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 82.

[34] "The Montessori teacher acts paradoxically, through the environment, as a leader who must follow the children." Karen Bennetts and Jane Bone, "Adult Leadership and the Development of Children's Spirituality: Exploring Montessori's Concept of the Prepared Environment," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 24:4 (2019): 359.

[35] Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 82.

must clearly understand that when we give the child freedom and independence, we are giving freedom to a worker already braced for action, who cannot live without working and being active."[36]

This raises the question of how this practically looks in the Montessori classroom. When describing the Montessori approach, Marshall contrasts it from the traditional classroom: "The Montessori classroom is very different to the teacher-led classroom with its highly structured day where short timeslots are devoted to each activity, the whole class is engaged in the same activities at the same time, and the teacher instructs at the front of the class."[37] In the Montessori classroom, one finds didactic learning materials designed age-appropriately from which the child selects based on his or her own interests. About this, Lillard and McHugh comment, "Within the prepared environment, children are free to pursue their natural interests and respond to what Dr. Montessori considered an innate drive to work."[38] This self-directed approach provides true individualization; it enables children to study what they want to study and learn what they want to learn.[39]

Related to older students (whether adolescents or adults), Montessori also advocates strongly for the necessity of preparing the environment for independence. She writes, "The first reform in education must be to offer a wider environment and to multiply the possibilities of association and of activity."[40] In so doing, she desires

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[36] Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 82.

[37] Marshall, "Montessori Education," 3.

[38] Lillard and McHugh, "Authentic Montessori," 4. Additionally, they comment, "Montessori environments are carefully prepared by the teacher to provide opportunities for children's development while protecting children from obstacles to that development" (4).

[39] Montessori qualifies the difference between "childhood independence" and "adult independence": "We must not project into the world of children the same ideas of independence and freedom that we hold to be ideal in the world of adults. If adults were asked to examine themselves, and to give a definition of freedom and independence, they could not succeed with any accuracy, for their idea of freedom is a very sorry one." Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 81.

[40] Maria Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, Montessori Series 12 (Amsterdam:

students to have greater choice and selectivity in their educational process. She continues, "If it is true that even for children education cannot be carried out within the four walls of the school, so much more this must be repeated for adults. It is necessary even for a child to feel himself independent: the adult must then have already realized this independence."[41]

This need for independence is discussed further as Montessori notes different areas of the student's life that should follow this pattern. About this, she is worth quoting at length as she discusses independence for the university student:

> It will be of great advantage for a really studious individual to begin to conquer economic independence during the period of its university studies. Many a young person, while he attends the university, is already a private teacher, or a journalist, an artist or a merchant, and even a common workman or a waiter. Many have already experienced situations in broadcasting companies or in diplomacy.
> These workers are more likely to study for the love of study and of human progress, and not for the immediate and direct purpose of a profession. If they take one or two years longer in their studies, what does it matter? Considering that their study will never cease, why should they take so much trouble to obtain in the shortest possible time the advantages that the degree affords them; when they are destined, if they wish to keep up with the ever-rising level of efficiency, to pursue the new things that are continuously being elaborated in the field of their profession? . . .
> An adult who studies must not be worried as a child by examinations, nor fear the scolding of a father who is forced to support him by what little means he possesses. He should not resort to subterfuges in order to get good marks, nor dishonour himself because he cannot keep chaste. A university student must first of all know how to achieve his own independence and moral equilibrium.[42]

Here, Montessori recognizes the lasting and far-reaching implications of independence in a student's life. As she states, "These workers are more likely to study for the love of study and of human progress, and not for the immediate and direct purpose of a

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Montessori-Pierson, 2007), 84.

[41] Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 86.

[42] Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 87–88. Montessori continues by discussing student finances: "I believe that all possible provision should be made in order to create some form of work to confer economic independence on the students of the university so that each may really be free to study and be able to find his own place in accordance with his own value" (88).

profession."[43] Montessori's point is that the educational environment must be intentionally prepared to encourage independence in the lives of students.

**Prepared for Spiritual Enrichment**

Montessori's focus on preparing an environment for spiritual growth was recognized by a variety of her contemporaries. Standing comments on letters Montessori would receive from Catholic priests regarding her educational approach. He records one such instance:

> The humility and the patience of the mistress in the Children's House, the superior value of deeds over words; the sensorial environment as the beginning of the life of the soul; the silence and recollection obtained from the children; the liberty left to the child soul in striving after perfection; the minute care in preventing and correcting all that is evil, even simple error, or slight imperfection; the control of error by means within the very material for development; the respect shown for the interior life of the child—all these were pedagogical principles which to him seemed to emanate from, and to be directly inspired by Catholicism.[44]

To this, Montessori replied, "Although these Fathers neither knew me, nor knew that I was a Catholic, and, although in my book, I made no direct profession of religious faith, it seemed to them that in its very substance my method was Catholic."[45] And again, "There is a striking resemblance between the method of the Montessori school and the method of the Catholic Church, in the manner in which both institutions adapt themselves, in practice, to the psychological nature of man."[46] Montessori's point is that her method—down to the minor details—is rooted in a Christian worldview and demands a certain unique preparation of the environment.[47] In this way, the educational

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[43] Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 87.

[44] Standing, *Maria Montessori*, 57. A slightly adjusted version of this quote is found in Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 2, cited earlier in this study in chapter 1.

[45] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 2.

[46] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 144.

[47] "Oh! if only psychologists knew these exercises and this innate tendency of the child soul! Religiously inclined, and free in their intellectual operations and in the work which the Montessori Method offers them, the little ones prove themselves to be exceptionally 'strong and robust' souls, just as the bodies of well-nourished, well-cared-for children are robust. Growing up in this way, they display neither shyness

environment should find its basis in the church. She writes, "What is the Church if it is not a specially prepared environment for drawing out and sustaining the super-natural life of man?"[48] To Montessori, the effective educational institution that holistically develops the life of the child will replicate this spiritually prepared environment.

Montessori was posed the question as to how the ideal educational environment, the school campus, would look—one that would prepare children not just academically, but also spiritually. She refers to this as "the Atrium." Her response is worth quoting at length:

> That is a rather big question. Well, first, I would try and find some architects and artists who understood the child spirit; and I would get them to give of their best. I have no patience with the idea that because children are very young they can be put off with the second best. I would have the room built in an ecclesiastical style, with pointed windows, which would be adorned with sacred pictures. The windows, of course, would be very low, down to the children's level—like everything else in the room. . . . On the walls would be sacred pictures illustrating Old and New Testament stories. The whole room would be fitted up as a sensorial environment calling out to the souls of the little children. . . . Adjoining the Atrium, I would have a special garden for the children. The ideal thing would be to have the school arranged like a monastery round a little cloister. The Church could be on one side, the Atrium on another, and on the other two the ordinary classrooms.[49]

About the Atrium, Montessori also writes,

> Thus it will be seen that the work of the Atrium would be a much broader thing than merely 'teaching the child his catechism'—often with the avowed aim of making a good impression on the Diocesan Inspector, or the Bishop! It will rather be a life complete in itself, something which will affect the children at all points. It will be like a surrounding and pervading atmosphere in which they will live and move and have their being.[50]

Notice in particular, her pointed statements, "The whole room would be fitted up as a

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nor fear, nor credulity. They show a pleasing ease and grace of manner, courage, accurate knowledge of things, faith above all in life and in God, the author and conserver of life." Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 10.

[48] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 26.

[49] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 32–33. Related to the idea of a monastery, Montessori comments, "What do the monks do? They remain in that prepared environment day after day; now these same principles can be applied to the entire psychic life for the training of character. If man be a unity, his path must be equally so. In the inner life there is also unity" (107).

[50] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 49.

sensorial environment calling out to the souls of the little children,"[51] and "It will be like a surrounding and pervading atmosphere in which they will live and move and have their being."[52] In other words, the environment must be intentionally prepared to encourage spiritual growth. She qualifies this, though, "This does not imply that environment is the cause of the growth; it is rather the means towards it."[53] And again, "We venture to say that it is useless to teach the principles of strength; our aim must be to make strong men."[54] In this way, every aspect about both the environment and the pedagogical methods must encourage students toward spiritual growth.

Montessori did not separate the spiritual from the secular in regard to the classroom and campus environment:

> The spiritual school puts no limits to the beauty of its environment, save economical limits. No ornament can distract a child really absorbed in his task; on the contrary, beauty both promotes concentration of thought and offers refreshment to the tired spirit. Indeed, the churches, which are *par excellence* places of meditation and of repose for the life of the soul, have called upon the highest inspirations of genius to gather every beauty within their precincts.[55]

Just as a carefully designed church building ("*par excellence* places of meditation and of repose") will reflect aesthetic beauty, so should the classroom. Two brief caveats—first, Montessori is careful to qualify "no limits . . . save *economical* limits," and second, she specifies no architectural details other than "the highest inspirations of genius." This provides a great deal of freedom for the school, as the classroom need not be extravagant, nor must the architecture be modeled after a certain or specific style. Rather, it ought to simply be beautiful in its aesthetic, evoking in the student a focus on that which is transcendent.

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[51] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 33.

[52] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 49.

[53] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 110.

[54] Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 107.

[55] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 110.

Additionally, Montessori specifies certain needed characteristics of ideal teachers when she writes, "The vision of the teacher should be at once precise like that of the scientist, and spiritual like that of the saint. The preparation for science and the preparation for sanctity should form a new soul, for the attitude of the teacher should be at once positive, scientific and spiritual."[56] To Montessori, the teacher is one who ought to be both "precise" academically as well as keenly prepared to speak to "spiritual" matters. Montessori specifies important aspects of the environment when she asserts that the classroom ought not be a place for extensive lecture—or even conversation—but rather a place of *silence*. Montessori writes, "*Silence is missing from human life*. Silence is missing, yet all those people who are on a higher spiritual plane, all those who achieve greatness, have felt the *need for silence*."[57] In this way, the classroom should be a quiet, peaceful, and beautiful environment where children are free to pursue their own interests under the guidance of their spiritual teacher. About the role of the teacher, Standing comments, "We can say that Maria Montessori was herself the personification of what her own ideal teacher should be—'one who combines the self-sacrificing spirit of the scientist with the love of the disciple of Christ.'"[58] Each of these elements (the environment, the educational method, and the teacher) are vital in Montessori's approach to encourage the formation of man.

**Prepared to Replicate Practical Life**

According to Montessori, "Education should not limit itself to seeking new methods for a mostly arid transmission of knowledge: its aim must be to give the

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[56] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 104.

[57] Maria Montessori, *The Child, Society and the World*, Montessori Series 7 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2016), 57 (emphasis original). About this, Montessori further comments, "People who are trying to improve themselves or who wish to attain a high level of intellectual achievement—artists or poets, for example—need this silence. It is a necessity" (52).

[58] Standing, *Maria Montessori*, 88.

necessary aid to human development."[59] In other words, education should replicate

practical life by encouraging holistic growth beyond mere acquisition of knowledge.

Montessori comments, "Being active with one's own hands, having a determined

practical aim to reach, is what really gives inner discipline."[60] The facilities of a

Montessori school, although certainly distinct from traditional schools, need not be

unnecessarily fancy or expensive to achieve this sort of goal. On the contrary, the

Montessori school is to be very much like a traditional home. About this, Lillard and

McHugh comment, "The Montessori environment was designed to be a natural extension

of the home; the original classroom was an apartment in a housing project where the

teacher lived as well. Dr. Montessori seemed to think it important that children have their

own space; hence, she called the Primary classroom a *Children's House*."[61] Although

Montessori certainly sought to incorporate elements of aesthetic beauty in her Children's

Houses, these schools were first and foremost, *houses*. Part of this was of necessity, as

would be the case with the start of any institution. Montessori, however, did not see this

as a detriment to the school but as a vital component. She asserted that moving forward,

schools, "like the original Children's Houses, might be instituted in the very buildings

inhabited by the parents of the pupils."[62] The concept of an age-appropriate means to

replicate practical life (Montessori's four planes) was discussed and considered

previously in chapter 2.[63]

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[59] Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 80.

[60] Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 83. Montessori continues, "The inert child who never worked with his hands, who never had the feeling of being useful and capable of effort, who never found by experience that to live means living socially, and that to think and to create means to make use of a harmony of souls; this type of child will become a selfish youth, he will be pessimistic and melancholy and will seek on the surface of vanity the compensation for a lost paradise" (84).

[61] Lillard and McHugh, "Authentic Montessori," 13.

[62] Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 107.

[63] See especially, Maria Montessori, *Citizen of the World: Key Montessori Readings*, Montessori Series 14 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2019). In particular, see her chapter, "The Four Planes of Education," 27–38.

Within the Montessori school, many basic and elementary tasks are accomplished that replicate practical life:

> The children of three years of age in the "Children's Houses" learn and carry out such work as sweeping, dusting, making things tidy, setting the table for meals, waiting at the table, washing the dishes, etc., and at the same time, they learn to attend to their own personal needs, to wash themselves, to take showers, to comb their hair, to take a bath, to dress and undress themselves, to hang up their clothes in the wardrobe, or to put them in drawers, to polish their shoes.[64]

Although these tasks may seem tedious and some may argue that they do not belong in an educational institution, Montessori asserts, "These exercises are part of the method of education . . . This has a truly educational, not utilitarian purpose."[65] What is the educational purpose? In large part, teaching independence and the value of exploration in day-to-day life. Montessori continues by describing the eventual results:

> The reaction of the children may be described as a "burst of independence" of all unnecessary assistance that suppresses their activity and prevents them from demonstrating their own capacities. It is just these "independent" children of ours who learn to write at the age of four and a half years, who learn to read spontaneously, and who amaze everyone by their progress in arithmetic.[66]

Again, Montessori's point is that the children who learn to replicate practical life are instilled with an independence and confidence to continue learning on their own, even as they interact with peers and grow in social abilities. Bennetts and Bone summarize this relationship between the child and the Montessori classroom: "The environment functions to attract the child and provide opportunities for work, which Montessori argued is the means to optimal development."[67]

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[64] Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 62–63.

[65] Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 63.

[66] Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 63.

[67] Bennetts and Bone, "Adult Leadership and the Development of Children's Spirituality," 359. Additionally, they write, "The reciprocal relationship of the human being to his environment is a central Montessori theme—humans transform their environments and are transformed by it" (359).

**Summary of Montessori's Educational
Framework**

The Montessori early childhood classroom is prepared *beautifully*, *age-appropriately*, *for independence*, *for spiritual enrichment*, and *to replicate practical life*. In this way, the classroom is prepared to intentionally encourage holistic growth ("the formation of man"). About this, Montessori writes, "Until the present, it was believed that the most effective learning took place when knowledge was passed on directly to the child by his teachers. But it is really the environment that is the best teacher. The child needs objects to act; they are like nourishment for his spirit."[68] *It is really the environment that is the best teacher*. To Montessori, if you put children in the right environment, they cannot help but learn. Might the same be true with seminary students?

**Establishing the Framework**

Writing specifically of seminary education, Lawrence Richards comments, "The 'hidden curriculum' of the learning setting has a greater impact on the learner than the 'content' curriculum which is being taught in the instruction."[69] The goal of the remainder of this chapter is to propose a framework for seminary education that prioritizes both content as well as methodology, all intentionally designed to encourage the formation of man. In this way, the goal is to propose an approach to seminary that aligns the explicit curriculum with the hidden curriculum of the environment.

In the following pages, the proposed framework is considered and articulated specifically for seminary education: *Theological higher education that encourages redemptive formation prioritizes the student's liberty by intentionally preparing the environment (1) beautifully, (2) age-appropriately, (3) for independence, (4) for spiritual enrichment, and (5) to replicate practical life*.

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[68] Maria Montessori, *Education and Peace* (Oxford: Clio Press, 2007), 57.

[69] Lawrence O. Richards, *Christian Education: Seeking to Become Like Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 159.

**1. Beautifully**

        The seminary ought to be an aesthetically beautiful environment. From the moment of arriving on campus, one's physical presence on the seminary grounds—particularly in the classroom—should evoke an experience fundamentally distinct to that of other educational institutions; it should evoke a unique delight and aesthetic enjoyment.[70] There are, of course, a great many ways in which the school might achieve this end without economic extravagance.[71] If the school has extensive financial resources, they may be used. If there are tight financial constraints, that does not pose an insurmountable problem. To be clear, though, the seminary will likely need to devote a considerable portion of its budget to achieve the desired results; a beautiful campus and intentionally prepared classrooms are not inexpensive. The classrooms, however, need not be gaudy; a rustic simplicity may in fact be preferable to an artificial grandiosity.[72]

        The rural seminary will undoubtedly look different than the urban campus. In this way, the facilities should architecturally reflect the seminary's mission as well as its geographic location. A seminary in the southern United States ought to look different than a campus in the northeast, just as a campus in India ought to look different than one in

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[70] In discussing the concept of beauty and its experiential nature, Jonathan King writes, "The beauty of something evokes from the percipient (the perceiving subject) an affective response of delight—that is, a kind of aesthetic pleasure. . . . Indeed, what uniquely characterizes the quality of beauty is its effect of evoking pleasure or delight in the act of perceiving it." Jonathan King, *The Beauty of the Lord: Theology as Aesthetics*, Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018), introduction.

[71] In reference to the idea of beauty, Thomas Aquinas poses an objective definition, "For beauty includes three conditions, 'integrity' or 'perfection,' since those things which are impaired are by the very fact ugly; due 'proportion' or 'harmony'; and lastly, 'brightness' or 'clarity,' whence things are called beautiful which have a bright color." Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 39, a. 8, in vol. 2, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1922). Aquinas's conditions of 'integrity,' 'harmony,' and 'clarity,' provide an objective paradigm by which to evaluate beauty. Toward this end, beauty matches purpose or *telos*. Although beauty is often equated with expense, it only need be if it is defined as such. In reference to a seminary program, the campus must be beautiful in that the facilities correspond to the institution's purpose.

[72] Throughout this discussion, I do not intend to conflate *classroom* and *campus*. As with Montessori's writings regarding her Children's Houses, the focus should *primarily* be on the interior classrooms rather than the exterior campus. However, as with any residential course of study, the campus and classrooms are intricately related, as the seminary student likely lives (or at least studies, eats, works, etc.) in various locations on the campus (e.g., library, dorms, cafeteria). In this way, the primary focus is on the beauty of the classrooms, yet a secondary (though closely related) focus is on the beauty of the campus as a whole.

England. Artistic beauty—down to the choice of wood tone and color palettes—ought to be incorporated into the classrooms in such a way that is tasteful, contextually appropriate, and culturally sensitive. Nothing should appear artificial, cheap, or gimmicky; everything should feel real and authentic. In all things, the classrooms (and campus) ought to be characterized by an excellence that reflects the beauty of the transcendent Creator God. This very well may involve reproducing elements that are historically significant to an institution's confessional heritage or geographic location, such as the New England colonial meeting house, the Gothic cathedral, and so forth.

That the seminary is prepared *beautifully* encourages the formation of man in that inculcates a vision of God and his goodness. It encourages the student to recognize his or her frailty in contrast to God's transcendence. Furthermore, it provides a glimpse of an orderly environment that harkens back to the creation originally intended (Gen 1–2) and in so doing, points forward to the hope of new creation (Rev 21–22).

## 2. Age-Appropriately

The seminary ought to be an environment that reflects the latest advancements in adult learning methods, qualified by a historic, orthodox Christian analysis and critique.[73] It should exhibit sound pedagogical—or more precisely, *andragogical*—principles.[74] Although stationary desks and lecture halls may occasionally be appropriate, the classroom environment should be designed taking adult learning methods into

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[73] Related to this point, a general familiarity with developmental theorists and educational psychologists (e.g., Erik Erikson, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg) is important for the theological educator. From a historic, orthodox Christian perspective, elements might be incorporated, refined, or rejected in the curriculum. See John David Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 1): Approaching and Qualifying Models of Human Development," *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 3 (2019): 458–75; and Trentham, "Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2): Engaging the Appropriating Models of Human Development," *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 3 (2019): 476–94. For an example of Trentham's model in action, see Alair August, "A Theological Analysis of the Educational Method of Maria Montessori Using an Inverse Consistency Protocol" (EdD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023).

[74] "The six principles of andragogy are (1) the learner's need to know, (2) self-concept of the learner, (3) prior experience of the learner, (4) readiness to learn, (5) orientation to learning, and (6) motivation to learn." Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, *The Adult Learner*, 3; cf. 63–67.

consideration. Desks ought never be used merely because they are found in university

classrooms. Priority should consistently be given to smaller class sizes and more intimate

settings.[75] Executive chairs encircling a round mahogany table or brown leather couches

surrounding a roaring fire are likely more conducive to communal and transformative

learning than the rows of seats found in many traditional classrooms. If adults learn best

through discussion, then perhaps the room should not have a lectern or podium.

Everything about the classroom should be designed age-appropriately to ensure that the

adult student feels respected as one created in the image of God who uniquely contributes

to the dynamics of the class.

That the seminary is prepared *age-appropriately* encourages the formation of

man in that it values each individual as created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). It

recognizes developmental differences depending on age and seeks to teach accordingly.

In so doing, the student is better equipped to learn and grow in the wisdom, knowledge,

and fear of the Lord.

## 3. For Independence

The seminary environment ought to contribute to the student's pursuit of

independent learning and interest driven exploration. Although the academic curriculum

largely determines the student's course of study, the campus environment should foster

self-directed and holistic learning, what Montessori refers to as "auto-education."[76] In

this approach, individualization is priority; it could be said that students study what they

want, when they want. In the Montessori-styled seminary, students are free to pursue their

unique interests under the tutelage of mentor professors, professors who function more as

guides who assist than lecturers who impart. To be clear, this does not negate the fact that

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[75] Knowles, Holton, and Swanson note that the idea of andragogy "organized ideas around the notion that adults learn best in informal, comfortable, flexible, nonthreatening settings." Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, *The Adult Learner*, 59.

[76] Montessori, *The Montessori Method*, 174.

if the seminary is to be a place where pastors and ministry leaders are vocationally equipped, core theological doctrines and disciplines must be imparted.[77] The point here is that there are a variety of viable educational methods to achieve the end of vocational ministry training.[78] A curriculum that prioritizes independence in such an institution could include, for example, a variety of elective course options, required independent studies, one-on-one mentoring, learning contracts, or the completion of a thesis project. In many ways, the curriculum at such an institution is inseparable from the environment. James Estep comments, "What is curriculum? . . . Curriculum is essentially the plan for how all the lessons, experiences, and relationships collectively nurture, equip, and mentor a learner toward a desired set of objectives; all of which dictates how we do education."[79]

Although writing of children, Montessori's statement is eminently applicable to adult seminary students: "Little he cares about the knowledge of others; he wants to acquire a knowledge of his own, to have experience of the world, and to perceive it by his own unaided efforts."[80] This aligns quite closely with modern andragogical principles.[81] Practical steps to achieve the aim of prioritizing independence could include the designation of individual study spaces—beautiful spaces—for each student to call their own in the library or another academic building, as well as the requirement for students to maintain handwritten journals documenting personal prayers, spiritual disciples, and pivotal life events during their course of study.

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[77] One thinks, for instance, of passages such as 2 Tim 2:2, "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."

[78] Language courses such as Koine Greek and Ancient Hebrew are likely not as well suited for "auto-education" in quite the same way as church history, systematic theology, or Bible exposition courses.

[79] James Estep, Roger White, and Karen Estep, *Mapping Out Curriculum in Your Church: Cartography for Christian Pilgrims* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 13.

[80] Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 8.

[81] "Adults have a deep need to be self-directing; therefore, the role of the teacher is to engage in a process of mutual inquiry with them rather than to transmit his or her knowledge to them and then evaluate their conformity to it." Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, *The Adult Learner*, 39.

That the seminary is prepared *for independence* encourages the formation of man in that it seeks to instill a life-long love of learning and equips students to pursue their own academic interests and passions. This, in turn, provides the continually growing student with the knowledge and tools necessary to train others in the faith (2 Tim 2:2).

**4. For Spiritual Enrichment**

The seminary environment ought to be prepared in such a way that is conducive to spiritual growth. This is certainly not to say that spiritual growth is dependent on the setting; one thinks, for instance, of the apostles singing hymns in prison—certainly not an aesthetic environment! However, so far as it depends on the institution, careful consideration should be placed on how one's physical presence on campus and in the classroom is itself spiritually enriching. In this way, the campus's aesthetic beauty should point the student to the transcendence of God. This is not to say that stained glass windows and Gothic architecture are a necessity, though they certainly may be appropriate.

Perhaps there could be space designated for spiritual disciplines to be practiced. This could be a chapel or prayer room, maybe a guided nature-walk or place to enjoy the beauty of creation. For those institutions fortunate to be located near geographical landmarks (mountains, wilderness, lakes, rivers, the ocean), this could involve requiring hikes or excursions that utilize the natural blessings of the Lord. Perhaps historic Christian artwork and ancient biblical manuscripts could be displayed in the halls between classes. In sum, the very campus environment should assist in preparing one's soul for worship. The seminary should be a place where one encounters God and proclaims like Peter at the Mount of Transfiguration, "It is good that we are here" (Matt 17:4). In this environment, spiritual disciplines are practiced: Bible reading, prayer, worship, evangelism, service, stewardship, fasting, and silence and solitude.

That the seminary is prepared *for spiritual enrichment* encourages the

formation of man in that it places a high priority upon spiritual disciplines with the aim of more fully knowing and loving Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Phil 3:10). The environment provides a holistic opportunity for spiritual refreshment where spiritual disciplines can be practiced as the student grows both in knowledge of and relationship with his or her Savior.

## 5. And to Replicate Practical Life

The seminary environment ought not be alien to everyday experiences; on the contrary, it should replicate practical life. Concerning adult education, Knowles, Holton, and Swanson comment, "Adults' orientation to learning is life-centered; therefore, the appropriate units for organizing adult learning are life situations, not subjects."[82] Toward this end, the seminary campus—at least the classroom environment—should feel less like a traditional school and more like a home. It was not for no reason that Montessori called her schools Children's *Houses*. There are unquantifiable elements that come with experiencing this sort of practical life: sharing meals together, discussing theology around the dining room table, and laughing while playing board games in the living room. The home is a place where good and godly family dynamics can be modeled, where husbands and wives can witness what lifelong faithfulness and companionship look like as they see their seasoned professors and spouses interact. The larger seminary should not be excused from this sort of community living. To achieve these experiences, administration could arrange students in small groups that meet in a professor's home throughout the semester.

On a different but related note, some schools may choose to encourage physically intensive campus work to replicate practical life—splitting firewood, tending a campus garden, repairing a damaged roof. Such activities not only teach real life skills,

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[82] Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, *The Adult Learner*, 39. These authors continue, "Experience is the richest resource for adults' learning; therefore, the core methodology of adult education is the analysis of experience" (39).

but encourage a holistic approach to life and ministry, an approach that prioritizes both patient and meaningful work, as well as abundant and intentional living. For the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) accredited seminary, this likely involves tailoring Theological Field Experience (TFE) requirements in such a way that they are embedded in most every course. In this way, each student selects practical means whereby he or she demonstrates proficiency of each academic discipline.

That the seminary is prepared *to replicate practical life* encourages the formation of man in that it provides an opportunity to grow in a variety of immeasurable personal and interpersonal ways as each student interacts on a daily basis with others who love the Lord. The goal is that this instills a passion to live the abundant life in Christ (John 10:10).

## Conclusion

This chapter has proposed the following conceptual framework, based upon an adaptation of Maria Montessori's educational approach: *Theological higher education that encourages redemptive formation prioritizes the student's liberty by intentionally preparing the environment beautifully, age-appropriately, for independence, for spiritual enrichment, and to replicate practical life*. Could it be the case that if the seminary student is put in the right environment—the prepared environment—that he or she cannot help but learn? For redemptive formation to occur in the seminary, perhaps the *telos* ("the formation of man") and the educational methodology ("liberty in a prepared environment") should align.

In chapter 4, this conceptual framework is assessed from a historic, orthodox Christian perspective in an effort to consider its congruence with the teachings of Scripture. In chapter 5, advantages and disadvantages to this framework are considered, as well as potential avenues for further study on the topic.

CHAPTER 4

BIBLICALLY ASSESSING THE CONCEPTUAL
FRAMEWORK

Chapter 3 proposed the following conceptual framework: *Theological higher education that encourages redemptive formation prioritizes the student's liberty by intentionally preparing the environment beautifully, age-appropriately, for independence, for spiritual enrichment, and to replicate practical life.* This chapter assesses this framework from a biblical and theological perspective. The aim is to first consider the role of the environment (as in Montessori's concept of "liberty in a prepared environment"[1]) in theological higher education generally, and subsequently to closely analyze each element of the proposed framework. It is suggested that this proposed framework is not only congruent with the teachings of Scripture, but due to its holistic approach, a potentially viable option for educational reform that seeks the *telos* of the formation of man.

**The Role of Environment in Theological Education**

The similarity between the seminary environment and that of secular institutions is evident not only in regard to teaching methods, but often in the classroom environment and campus aesthetic. Although in centuries past the Christian church has led in areas of aesthetic and artistic accomplishment, this is often not the case with the modern Protestant and evangelical church, reflected even in the design of many seminary campuses. James Spiegel rightly observes, "Evangelicals tend to be . . . rigidly utilitarian

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[1] Maria Montessori, "The Child in the Church," in *Montessori: On Religious Education*, ed. Maria Montessori and E. M. Standing (Lake Ariel, PA: Hillside Education, 2020), 109.

in their approach to Christian art and apathetic about developing a biblical aesthetic."[2]

About the Christian school specifically, John Hull argues,

> [These] schools are patterned after the comprehensive school model that streams students into earlier and later entries into the work force. From scheduling to the organization of the school day [these schools] adhere to the traditional production mould of schooling. Neither is there evidence of a distinctively Christian curriculum tailored to facilitating a transforming vision of education.[3]

According to Hull, the Christian school mirrors the model of the American public school approach. Since the campus and classroom aesthetic of the public school are largely built on pragmatic principles and secular business ideology,[4] the aesthetic of the Christian educational institution is seldom rooted in any sort of biblical or theological rationale. This lack of focus on the environment is not only rooted in secular theory, but perhaps also to a specific vision of historic Christian thought. Frank Nelson notes that lack of environmental aesthetic concern is perhaps due in part to the historical development of American Christian education and its Puritan influence:

> This emphasis on a plain style carried over into the Puritans' architecture, and it too had to have utility. When the American Puritan turned to building churches, he built functional structures rather than ornate cathedrals. The function of the church building was a place for the preaching of the Word of God, and to the Puritan form must not take precedence over function. Contemporary historians and writers have found much wrong with the Puritans' life style, but no one can charge them with disdain for learning.[5]

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[2] James S. Spiegel, "Aesthetics and Worship," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 2, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 40. Additionally, see Spiegel, "Towards a New Aesthetic Vision for the Christian Liberal Arts College," *Christian Scholar's Review* 28, no. 3 (Spring 1999): 466–75. In this essay, Spiegel comments, "To even utter the phrase 'evangelical art' is more likely to evoke a cringe than a query of serious interest" (466–67).

[3] John E. Hull, "Christian Education and the Deep Structure of Schooling" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1993), 100.

[4] On this topic see, for example, Raymond E. Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency: A Study of the Social Forces that Have Shaped the Administration of the Public Schools* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962). Callahan writes about "the strength of the business ideology in the American culture on the one hand and the extreme weakness and vulnerability of schoolmen, especially school administrators, on the other" (viii). Callahan asserts, "I am now convinced that very much of what has happened in American education since 1900 can be explained on the basis of the extreme vulnerability of our schoolmen to public criticism and pressure and this vulnerability is built into our pattern of local support and control" (viii).

[5] Frank C. Nelson, "The Aesthetic Dimension of Christian Education," *Religious Education*

This is not to say that there are not some notable exceptions where a Christian aesthetic has been strongly advocated,[6] nor is it to say that there are not valid concerns about prioritizing aesthetics over other contemporary issues—there certainly are.[7]

Regarding an intentional avoidance of the topic of Christian aesthetics—and by implication, the preparation of the Christian educational environment—Jo Ann Davidson notes that a concern for those in poverty often causes some to question the importance of aesthetics: "The luxury of Beauty is not appropriate when many are in desperate need of food, shelter, and justice."[8] Likewise, Davidson comments, "Others suggest that the urgency of Christian eschatology does not allow for unnecessary or peripheral aesthetic considerations."[9] As such, the aesthetic beauty and preparedness of the seminary campus is often incidental and unintentional. Although a beautiful campus may be desired by administration, faculty, and students, there is seldom theological rationale as to why it is necessary and needed. Nonetheless, Scripture does paint a rather robust portrait of aesthetic and artistic beauty.[10]

Aesthetics is the inquiry into the nature of beauty.[11] A Christian aesthetic,

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66, no. 5 (1971): 386.

[6] Some examples of helpful resources include: Frank E. Gaebelein, *The Christian, the Arts, and Truth: Regaining the Vision of Greatness* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1985); Francis A. Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973); Leland Ryken, ed., *The Christian Imagination: The Practice of Faith in Literature and Writing* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2002); Leland Ryken, *The Liberated Imagination: Thinking Christianly about the Arts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005); Jonathan King, *The Beauty of the Lord: Theology as Aesthetics*, Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018).

[7] There are numerous historical considerations pertinent to the development of Christian aesthetics. See Nelson, "Aesthetic Dimension of Christian Education," 385–89, who provides a helpful survey on the topic.

[8] Jo Ann Davidson, "Toward a Scriptural Aesthetic," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 4, no. 1 (2003): 101.

[9] Davidson, "Toward a Scriptural Aesthetic," 101.

[10] This is evident in a number of ways, including God's "very good" creation (Gen 1:31; Ps 8:3–4; 19:1; Luke 12:27), as well as the intended beauty of the tabernacle (Exod 31:2–6) and temple (1 Kgs 6:29, 32, 35).

[11] This definition is taken from Spiegel, "Aesthetics and Worship," 40.

therefore, may be defined as an inquiry into the nature of beauty that is congruent with historic, orthodox Christian thought. In this way, a Christian aesthetic is expressive of a Christian worldview and built upon a biblical theology of beauty. Knight observes that aesthetics play such a vital role in the educational environment that an institution inevitably imparts a specific aesthetic vision, whether or not this vision is even recognized:

> Human beings are aesthetic beings, and it is just as impossible to avoid teaching aesthetics in the school, home, media, or church as it is to avoid inculcating ethical values. If educators do not consciously face up to their aesthetic responsibilities, they will make aesthetic impressions upon their students unconsciously and uncritically.[12]

For the seminary that takes seriously a biblical worldview, the classroom and campus environment ought to align with the purpose, beliefs, and doctrinal commitments of the institution.[13] To do otherwise is not to avoid creating an aesthetic environment, but to create an *unintentional* aesthetic environment—one which is far more likely to align with secular educational philosophy than with biblical principles.[14] As Knight recognizes, in many ways the school does have "a responsibility to help students see the aesthetic dimension in the educational environment in such areas as architecture, the school grounds, personal neatness, and the neatly written paper."[15]

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[12] George R. Knight, *Philosophy and Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 4th ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press), 31.

[13] As noted in chapter 3, I do not intend to conflate *classroom* and *campus*. As discussed previously, Montessori is primarily concerned with the interior classroom, though she is not unconcerned with the entire campus. For the residential student, these two are often closely connected and sometimes inseparable.

[14] This is certainly not to say that secular educational philosophers are unconcerned with aesthetics; they undoubtedly are. For example, see John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1958), originally published 1934, which considers aesthetics from a naturalistic viewpoint. Other more recent studies on aesthetics in education include Olga Denac, "The Significance and Role of Aesthetic Education in Schooling," *Creative Education* 5 (2014): 1714–19. Denac asserts, "The most important aims and goals of aesthetic education can be described as the following: developing the aesthetic sense for the beautiful and a sense of proportion; developing aesthetic perception; experience, creating, evaluating and expressing the beautiful; developing a relationship toward nature and toward the beautiful in interpersonal relationships" (1715).

[15] Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 31. Knight continues by noting that in this sort of an environment, "Aesthetics permeates the educational atmosphere" (31).

**Assessing the Proposed Framework**

Since the intentional preparation of the classroom and campus environment is often peripheral to theological higher education, this study has proposed a framework that seeks to remedy the situation, largely by addressing the hidden curriculum. In view of Montessori's educational methodology, this study proposes that the seminary environment ought to be prepared *beautifully*, *age-appropriately*, *for independence*, *for spiritual enrichment*, and *to replicate practical life*. In the pages that follow, it is proposed that each of these suggestions is congruent with historic, orthodox Christian thought.

**Prepared Beautifully**

Chapter 3 proposed that the seminary ought to be a beautiful environment that evokes a unique delight and aesthetic enjoyment. In all things, the campus (especially the classrooms) ought to be characterized by an excellence that reflects the beauty of the transcendent Creator God. This, of course, will look different depending on the geographic location and financial resources available. Yet the goal will be that the beauty of the institution's facilities will encourage the formation of man by inculcating a vision of God and his goodness.

*The Beauty of God and the Creation*
*Mandate*

Central to a Christian aesthetic is the reality that the triune God is himself, beautiful. The Scriptures testify to this reality throughout the Old and New Testaments.[16] David proclaims his desire to "gaze upon the beauty of the Lord" (Ps 27:4). He writes, "Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of

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[16] "The Scriptures attest quite clearly to the beauty of the created order and describe throughout the biblical canon all manner of things in language denoting or connoting an aesthetic sense, not least 'the beauty (*no'am*) of the Lord' (Ps 27:4). At the lexical level both the Old Testament and the New Testament reveal a rich vocabulary of terms that convey a sense of beauty or aesthetics." King, *The Beauty of the Lord*, introduction.

holiness" (Ps 29:2). Likewise, Asaph declares, "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth" (Ps 50:2). The psalmist writes, "O Lord my God, you are very great! You are clothed with splendor and majesty" (Ps 104:1). In similar fashion, 1 Chronicles 16:29 reads, "Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness." Characteristics of the Lord God include beauty, splendor, majesty, and holiness.

The New Testament authors frequently develop this idea of God's beauty and splendor in reference to Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul asserts, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" (Col 1:15), and again, "We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor 3:18). In similar fashion, the author of Hebrews applies the language of the beautiful God to Jesus when he writes, "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Heb 1:3). When remembering his experience with Jesus, Peter proclaims, "We were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Pet 1:16).

From beginning to end, the Bible presents the triune God as the source of beauty and the One from whom all earthly beauty flows. About this, Jonathan Edwards is worth quoting at length:

> For as God is infinitely the greatest Being, so he is allowed to be infinitely the most beautiful and excellent: and all the beauty to be found throughout the whole creation, is but the reflection of the diffused beams of that Being who hath an infinite fulness of brightness and glory. . . . [He] is the head of the universal system of existence; the foundation and fountain of all being and all beauty; from whom all is perfectly derived, and on whom all is most absolutely and perfectly dependent.[17]

Edwards's point that all earthly beauty is derivative of God's divine beauty. Spiegel agrees when he asserts that God is "the foundation of aesthetics, the ground of all beauty."[18] He continues, "Consequently, any aesthetic satisfaction, whether of objects,

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[17] Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (London: William Ball, 1839), 125.

[18] Spiegel, "Aesthetics and Worship," 41.

animals, or other humans, and however seemingly remote from the divine, is ultimately an enjoyment of God."[19] If Spiegel is correct that aesthetic satisfaction is enjoyment of God, then perhaps the educational environment—especially the Christian educational environment—should lend itself to aesthetic satisfaction. In this way, theological higher education should not merely involve the transmission of knowledge about God, but also the aesthetic experience and enjoyment of God and his good gifts.

Related to God's beauty is the creation mandate, Genesis 1:26–30, or as William Edgar refers to it, the "cultural mandate."[20] Here, humans are created in the image of God (1:26–27) and instructed, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (1:28). William Edgar points out that some have wrongly taken this passage as simply referring to "an open-ended call to have as many children as is physically possible,"[21] or a "license to exploit or even violate the creation."[22] A preferable interpretation, however, is that this passage calls humans to be God's vice-regents who represent him on earth, modeled after Adam, the first "priest-king."[23] These verses, therefore, describe the Lord's commission for humans to multiply, subdue, and have dominion over all creation on behalf of the Lord, what N. Gray Sutanto refers to as the "'vocational' aspect of the image of God."[24]

About the creation mandate, Edgar summarizes, "Embedded in this human

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[19] Spiegel, "Aesthetics and Worship," 41.

[20] William Edgar, *Created and Creating: A Biblical Theology of Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 170.

[21] Edgar, *Created and Creating*, 166.

[22] Edgar, *Created and Creating*, 167.

[23] G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 33. See especially Beale's chapter 2, "The Redemptive-Historical Storyline of the Old Testament," 29–87.

[24] N. Gray Sutanto, "Cultural Mandate and the Image of God: Human Vocation under Creation, Fall, and Redemption," *Themelios* 48, no. 3 (2023): 593.

activity is (at least in germ form) the development of agriculture, the arts, economics, family dynamics, and everything that contributes to human flourishing, to the glory of God."[25] In this way, the creation mandate involves the building and development of a distinctly good culture (rooted in the goodness and beauty of God).[26] Edgar is worth quoting at length as he summarizes the implications:

> The human race was to populate the world beyond the garden, always with the purpose of using all its diversity and talents in the discovery of God's life-giving purposes; in a word, culture-making throughout the world. . . .
> We are vice-regents in this marvelous place, uncovering its riches and taming what is untamed so that all redounds to God's greater glory. Culture is achieved through benevolent dominion. . . . A preliminary definition of cultural engagement, then, could go like this: *Cultural engagement is the human response to the divine call to enjoy and develop the world that God has generously given to his image-bearers.* . . .
> Because of the fall, culture can and has become sinister. Christ's redeeming grace moves culture in the right direction, ennobles it, and allows it to extend the realm of God's *shalom*, his goodness, his justice, his love.[27]

This mandate to extend God's glory (Gen 1:28) is therefore applicable to Christians today who endeavor to serve both God and others through intentional culture building and engagement—all of which is to be done in submission to Christ.[28] Sutanto summarizes this well, "Cultural engagement that matters must be mediated and subordinated by the preaching of the Gospel."[29] Again Sutanto comments, "The great commission [Matt 28:18–20], therefore, does not negate the cultural mandate, but is rather the necessary means by which we fulfill it. . . . Christian cultural labor is a sign that points to what God

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[25] Edgar, *Created and Creating*, 167. For a similar discussion and survey of interpretations, see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

[26] "To be 'fruitful and multiply' refers to the natural multiplication of human beings and the work that cultivates nature for their own good, in accordance with God's command." Sutanto, "Cultural Mandate," 593.

[27] Edgar, *Created and Creating*, 176–77. Edgar devotes his subsequent discussion, chapter 9, "Culture after the Fall," 178–93, to the creation mandate after the fall of Gen 3.

[28] There are, of course, pitfalls to be avoided: "Cultural activity in itself, if divorced from God, is not pleasing to God and thus could not be considered an end in itself." Sutanto, "Cultural Mandate," 601.

[29] Sutanto, "Cultural Mandate," 601.

alone will bring about in the last day."[30]

Therefore, since God himself is beautiful and humans are commanded to expand a culture that reflects his character and glory—all for the purpose of pointing others to him—humans are to cultivate a distinctly *beautiful* culture.[31] Related to the topic of education, therefore, the theological educational environment (campus and classroom) ought to be beautiful for the purpose of pointing those involved to the beauty of the Creator.

*The Beauty of What God Ordains*

Related to the idea that God is the foundation of all beauty—and the creation mandate to build culture—is the reality that the Bible presents the institutions connected with God as aesthetically beautiful. Three additional examples are considered below: (1) *God's creation*—when God created the world, he created it very good; (2) *God's recorded revelation*—the writings of both the Old and New Testaments are literarily beautiful; (3) *God's ordained architecture*—when the tabernacle and temple were constructed, they were built in aesthetically satisfying ways.

*God's Creation as Beautiful*

When God created the heavens and the earth, he declared all things "very good" (Gen 1:31), a description that certainly includes more than merely utilitarian function but also aesthetic beauty.[32] This is confirmed in the placement of Adam and Eve

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[30] Sutanto, "Cultural Mandate," 603–4.

[31] "To cultivate creation well therefore involves discerning God's design for creation—culture-making can easily deform into hubris and abuse when we determine for ourselves what we ought to make out of the natural world." Sutanto, "Cultural Mandate," 594.

[32] About God's creation of the world as "good" (*tov*), Spiegel asserts, "It is most likely that *tov* in the Genesis creation narrative means that which is *good or excellent of its kind*. . . . In what sense, then, can it be said that all he has made is *tov*, excellent of its kind? The answer is that the term must be applied in the *aesthetic* sense. The evaluative judgment regards the *beauty* of the world." Spiegel, "Aesthetics and Worship," 41–42. Likewise, when commenting on God's creation as "good," Kenneth A. Mathews notes, "The meaning of *tôv* is quite fluid in the Old Testament as well as in Genesis, indicating for example that which is happy, beneficial, aesthetically beautifully, morally righteous, preferable, of superior quality, or of

not in a desert wilderness but in a garden that had "every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" (Gen 2:9). Notice the connection between function and form: not merely "good for food" but also "pleasant to the sight"; the fruit itself was *beautiful*.[33] Despite the present cursed state of the world (Gen 3:7–24; Rom 8:19–22), the universe still retains its beauty. David writes, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork" (Ps 19:1), and again, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" (Ps 8:3–4). The immense nature of the universe testifies to the power and majesty of God: "For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made" (Rom 1:20). Yet not only the immense scope of the universe, but even small details—even the existence of *flowers*—point to a benevolent and beautiful Creator: "Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Luke 12:27). Truly, "He has made everything beautiful in its time" (Eccl 3:11). God's creation is beautiful.

*God's Recorded Revelation as Beautiful*

The writings of Scripture are beautiful in literary form.[34] In the Bible one finds artistic psalms that can be sung, detailed narratives that engage the mind, creative

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ultimate value." Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary 1 (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 4.

[33] "Eden is characterized by trees yielding fruits that are pleasant in appearance and delightful to the taste: 'all kinds,' 'pleasing,' and 'good' evidence the extravagance the garden offered." Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 128.

[34] In addition to the literary beauty, the biblical authors often refer to the conceptual beauty of Scripture, that the Scriptures are beautiful in *content*. For example, Peter writes about the Lord's "precious and very great promises" (2 Pet 1:4). Regarding the Lord's decrees, David declares, "More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter than honey and drippings of the honeycomb" (Ps 19:10). He exclaims, "The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul" (Ps 19:7). Similarly, the psalmist writes, "The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces" (Ps 119:72), and again, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth" (Ps 119:103).

parables that stir the imagination, theological discourse that evokes adoration, and

detailed doxology that moves the heart to worship. This literary beauty is intricately

related to Scripture's content (as God's Word) and source (divine inspiration, 2 Tim 3:16).

As Davidson notes, "The nature of God's revelation is regularly expressed through

artistic manifestation."[35] The very fact that God's Word is composed in human artistic

forms and distinct genres indicates the desire for literary beauty on the part of the human

authors. Davidson continues, "The literary manifestation of Scripture . . . includes the

artful construction of sentences, verses, chapters, and entire books with extensive usage

of inclusios, chiasms, panels, and parallel writing."[36] In literary form, God's recorded

revelation is beautiful.

*God's Ordained Architecture as Beautiful*

Both the tabernacle and temple were to be constructed not just as practically

useful but as aesthetically beautiful. In Exodus 31:2–6, the Lord appoints Bezalel and

Oholiab as fine craftsmen to complete the tabernacle in the specified manner:

> I have called by name Bezalel . . . and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft. And behold, I have appointed with him Oholiab. (Exod 31:2–6)

Bezalel and Oholiab were to use their "intelligence" and "knowledge" to "devise artistic

designs"—not just *useful* designs, but *artistic* designs. They were appointed for the

unique task of constructing an aesthetically beautiful tabernacle. This aesthetic beauty is

evident also in the temple, where there were to be "engraved figures of cherubim and

palm trees and open flowers" (1 Kgs 6:29) as well as "carvings of cherubim, palm trees,

and open flowers" (1 Kgs 6:32; cf. 6:35). Even the priestly garments were carefully

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[35] Davidson, "Toward a Scriptural Aesthetic," 106.

[36] Davidson, "Toward a Scriptural Aesthetic," 106.

designed: "On its hem you shall make pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet yarns" (Exod 28:33). The fruit and gold imagery in the temple would certainly have reminded the Israelites of God's original "very good" creation and the perfection of the garden (1 Kgs 6:22, 28, 30, 32, 35). About this, Schaeffer aptly comments, "The Temple was covered with precious stones for beauty. There was no pragmatic reason for the precious stones. They had no utilitarian purpose. God simply wanted beauty in the temple."[37] Truly, God's ordained architecture is beautiful.

*Summary*

If both God and the institutions ordained by God are aesthetically beautiful—and the Lord has given his creation mandate—perhaps it follows that the seminary environment, as a location wherein one learns about God and grows in relationship with God, ought to be aesthetically beautiful. This study suggests that Montessori's vision of an environment that is prepared beautifully is congruent with the biblical vision of both the beauty of God himself as well as his creation.

**Prepared Age-Appropriately**

It was suggested in chapter 3 that the seminary environment should reflect the latest advancements in age-appropriate learning methods—specifically the latest in adult learning methods (andragogy). In this way, the classroom environment should be intentionally prepared in such a way that takes the developmental stages of adult learners into consideration. It was suggested that priority should be given to smaller class sizes and more intimate settings. Rather than most classrooms having desks set in rows with lecterns at the front, for many adult learners perhaps it is preferable to have the room set up in a circle to encourage discussion. There is certainly a great deal of flexibility here,

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[37] Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible*, 15. About nature, Schaeffer comments, "Come with me to the Alps and look at the snow-covered mountains. There can be no question. God is interested in beauty" (15).

depending on the situation and context of the institution. In this way, the environment is intentionally prepared to encourage the formation of man through the utilization of developmentally appropriate learning techniques.

*Developmental Stages*

Although Scripture does not describe specific intellectual developmental stages in the lifespan, it certainly recognizes them. The apostle Paul writes, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways" (1 Cor 13:11). About this passage, Andrew David Naselli aptly comments, "There is a big difference in maturity between how a child speaks, thinks, and reasons and how an adult does. This parallels our partial knowledge now versus later. This is the analogy: child : adult :: knowledge now : knowledge later."[38] In this passage, Paul uses this developmental difference as an analogy; nonetheless, it is a clear recognition that children and adults are not developmentally the same. Variations of this analogy are used throughout the epistles, regarding the developmental difference between children and adults (e.g., 1 Cor 14:20; 1 Pet 2:2; Heb 5:12–14).

Additionally, it is recorded in Luke's Gospel, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). That is, Jesus grew and naturally developed in maturity, just like other children who mature into adolescents and later adults. This distinction between the developmental stages of children and adults is also made evident by Jesus himself when he proclaims, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 19:14; cf. 18:3; Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17). Again, there is a clear recognition of developmental difference here. About this, Jonathan Kim writes,

Scripture does witness to the intellectual development of individuals. . . . However,

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[38] Andrew David Naselli, *1 Corinthians*, in *ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 10, *Romans to Galatians*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 349.

these are simply passing observations regarding the growth of individuals from childhood toward adulthood. . . . While Scripture does not provide a theory of intellectual development, it does indirectly bear witness to it. . . . This would certainly reflect a teacher's appreciation that younger or less advanced students were capable of mere rote memorization while acknowledging that students grow intellectually and become capable of independent thought.[39]

Although the Bible does not prescribe how intellectual developmental stages ought to be incorporated into an educational model, there is a definite biblical difference between how children and adults learn and behave.[40]

*Older Training Younger*

Throughout Scripture there is a consistent call for older and more mature believers to train and equip those who are younger in the faith. For instance, Paul writes in his epistle to Titus,

Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. (Titus 2:2–6)

In this passage, the older men (2:2) and older women (2:3) are to take an active role in teaching and personally exemplifying godly living for younger women (2:4) and younger men (2:6). Commenting on this passage, D. Edmond Hiebert notes, "These verses lay down some of the Christian attributes to be commended to different groups, divided according to age and sex."[41] In this way, they provide a helpful division for instruction

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[39] Jonathan H. Kim, "Intellectual Development and Christian Formation," in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, ed. James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 77–78.

[40] Reflecting on these developmental differences, Kim offers four practical suggestions for Christian education: "Adult education concerns participants, not pails! . . . Allow for questions and dialogue to correct misconceptions and to gain correct conceptions. . . . Ask thought-provoking questions and encourage self-reflection. . . . Lastly, focus on transformation, not just transmission." Kim, "Intellectual Development and Christian Formation," 92–93.

[41] D. Edmond Hibert, *Titus*, in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 11, *Ephesians to Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 435.

(formal and informal) based on one's age and developmental stage (cf. 1 John 2:12–14). This division based on age is evident in a variety of passages throughout Scripture, often designating the respect due to elders (e.g., Lev 19:32; Job 12:12; Lam 5:12; 1 Tim 5:1–2; 1 Pet 5:5).

This distinction between the older and the younger (often, though not always, understood as the *wiser* and the *less wise*) is particularly evident in the book of Proverbs. For example, Proverbs 20:29 states, "The glory of young men is their strength, but the splendor of old men is their gray hair." Similarly, Proverbs 16:31 states, "Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life." In view of the wisdom often acquired with age, Proverbs frequently calls the younger to follow the wisdom and counsel of the older (often in a parental—father/son—relationship): "Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching" (1:8); "Hear, O sons, a father's instruction and be attentive, that you may gain insight" (4:1); "My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ears to my sayings" (4:20); "My son, be attentive to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding" (5:1); "My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you" (7:1); "And now, O sons, listen to me: blessed are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it" (8:32–33); "Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old" (23:22); "My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching" (6:20); "A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke" (13:1). In these passages, there is a distinct role difference in that the older are to mentor the younger (cf. 2 Tim 1:4–7).

When Israel is instructed with the Shema (Deut 6:4–9), the people are told, "You shall teach [these words] diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise" (6:7). This certainly involves formal didactic instruction between parents and

children, yet also informal consideration throughout one's day.[42] However, there is a distinction here between the teaching methods for children ("teach them diligently to your children") and the methods used for adults to mentally recall and consider the Lord's past action. The point is that there is a distinction made throughout the Scriptures between the role of the older and the younger.

*Summary*

Since Scripture recognizes the developmental differences between children and adults, and also focuses on the necessity of older believers training younger believers, perhaps the educational methodology of the seminary ought to reflect this reality. Perhaps the seminary should be modeled after Montessori's learning environment that reflects the latest advancements in age-appropriate learning methods to intentionally seek the formation of students.

**Prepared for Independence**

Chapter 3 suggested that the seminary should be intentionally prepared to encourage the student's pursuit of independent learning and interest driven exploration. In this way, the seminary promotes student choice (Montessori's "liberty in a prepared environment") by fostering self-directed and holistic learning through a variety of means, such as elective course options, required independent studies, one-on-one academic mentoring, learning contracts, or the completion of a thesis project. Teachers in the Montessori-styled seminary function more as guides who assist than lecturers who impart (although this by no means eliminates the need for occasional lectures). Practical steps taken might include designating individual study spaces as well as requiring journaling

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[42] "The theme of educating the children, which continues throughout Deuteronomy, is important in the context of the covenant. . . . It was vital that the people of God not only remember their experience of God's mighty hand, but also that they pass on the memory, and thus the experience, to their children." Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 133.

and reflection on personal circumstances and growth. The purpose of preparation for independence is to pursue the formation of man by instilling a life-long love of learning and equipping students to pursue their academic passions.

*Freedom in Christ*

Although Scripture comments little on independence or choice in the learning process, the idea of individual autonomy and student selectivity is not foreign to the biblical authors. Paul writes in Galatians 5:1, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." The word "freedom" (*eleutheria*) may be translated as "liberty" or "the state of being free." It is used eleven times in the New Testament (Rom 8:21; 1 Cor 10:29; 2 Cor 3:17; Gal 2:4; 5:1, 13 (2x); Jas 1:25; 2:12; 1 Pet 2:16; 2 Pet 2:9).[43] Paul refers to "the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:21); he writes, "You were called to freedom, brothers" (Gal 5:13); Peter states, "Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God" (1 Pet 2:16); and James refers to the "law of liberty" (Jas 1:25; 2:12). The premise of one's freedom in Christ should not be equated with the modern sense of the term, as in the absence of all hindrance or restraint. Rather, it indicates that one is freed from the bonds of sin—freed to live as God intended— through the life-giving message of the gospel of Christ.[44] Commenting on this idea of Christian freedom, F. F. Bruce states,

> The call to freedom, then, is a call to oneness in Christ and to loving service within the believing community. The liberty of the gospel is not to be exercised in isolated independence. The Christian does not emulate the self-sufficiency of the Stoic . . . ;

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[43] In Galatians, Paul's focus is that freedom in the gospel is antithetical to slavery to law: "The Galatians must stand fast in their freedom and resist the pressure to submit to circumcision and the law." Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 307.

[44] As Paul makes clear in Romans, the believer who has been set free now belongs to Christ (Rom 8:9). It is this freedom about which Jesus states, "If the son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

his sufficiency is in Christ, and he is involved in the interdependent and loving fellowship of the people of Christ.[45]

In this way, Christian freedom is not necessarily the right to do what one wants, but the ability to do what one ought (a call to "loving service within the believing community"). This relates to the broader topic at hand—student independence, liberty, and selectivity—in that Christian freedom provides a *choice*. This is not to say that Christian freedom demands independent learning in the seminary, but rather simply that it corresponds. This concept of liberty as a result of the gospel message is congruent with one's freedom to select their course of study and the curriculum in theological higher education.

*Choice in Life Pursuits*

Throughout Scripture there is great freedom and flexibility for the believer in life pursuits. Although the question—What is God's will?—is often pondered, the answer is clearly presented. Paul states in Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." The will of God involves thanksgiving in prayer: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess 5:18); holy living: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality" (1 Thess 4:3); and respectful obedience: "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people" (1 Pet 2:15; cf. Jas 4:17). The believer is to seek God's will (Matt 6:33; Ps 119:105), understand God's will (Eph 5:17; Ps 25:4–5), do God's will (Mark 3:35; Heb 10:36), and pray for God's will (Matt 6:10; Phil 2:12–13). Yet despite the moral imperative to do God's will, there is a great deal of flexibility and choice in one's life pursuits.

This freedom for choice and selectivity in one's pursuits, given moral

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[45] F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 241.

obedience, is particularly evident in the wisdom literature (e.g., Proverbs, Ecclesiastes).

Ecclesiastes notes, "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under

heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what

is planted" (3:1–2). The text continues by describing how each person should take

pleasure in work:

> What gain has the worker from his toil? I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time . . . I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man. (3:9–13)

There is no command specific as to what the worker must do, simply that he should "be

joyful," and "eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil." Later Ecclesiastes states,

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might" (9:10; cf. Col 3:23; Rom 12:11).

Proverbs similarly states, "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord

establishes his steps" (16:9); and again, "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it

is the purpose of the Lord that will stand" (19:21). Here, there is freedom for the man to

plan his way; yet even in this freedom, the Lord still leads and guides. In Proverbs, two

paths of life are contrasted: the way of wisdom and the way of folly. Daniel Estes

comments, "In Proverbs, wisdom . . . is skill in living as Yahweh intends, and often it is

connected with understanding and knowledge."[46] Estes continues, "People can easily

deceive themselves about the legitimacy of their actions, but God probes the heart to

determine the real motives that lie behind their acts."[47] In this way, Proverbs is more

concerned with one's wisdom in how and why decisions are made, even as there is great

freedom and independence given to make these decisions. About this, W. Sibley Towner

comments,

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[46] Daniel J. Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 221.

[47] Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books*, 232.

> The fact that the book aims at affecting behavior by inculcating sound ethical values suggests that the sages believed their pupils could make independent and free decisions. The model suggests a universe upheld and guided by the sovereign purposes of the Lord. There is a sphere of human autonomy within which people must make independent choices and accept responsibility for their consequences.[48]

Within this "sphere of human autonomy within which people must make independent choices," each individual is responsible for decisions they make. Although this does not necessitate independence and freedom in seminary curriculum, it certainly allows for it.

*Variety of Abilities and Spiritual Gifts*

Related to this choice in life pursuits is the variety of abilities and spiritual gifts given by the Lord. In the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14–30), for instance, different servants are entrusted with different amounts: "To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability" (25:15). In the first two cases, the servant with five talents and the servant with two talents are told, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master" (25:21, 23). What is demanded is faithfulness in the circumstances and to the abilities graciously bestowed by God, not a specific outcome. As Paul notes, "Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful" (1 Cor 4:2). Related to this idea of God's gifting different individuals in different ways is the concept of spiritual gifts.

There are several passages that discuss the spiritual gifts: Romans 12:6–8, 1 Corinthians 12:4–11, 28, 1 Peter 4:10–11, and Ephesians 4:11. Although there are "varieties of gifts" (1 Cor 12:4), their purpose is the same, the building up of the body, the church. Paul writes, "God arranged the members of the body, each one of them, as he chose" (12:18). In this passage, Paul asks a series of questions, all of which grammatically demand a negative answer: "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all

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[48] W. Sibley Towner, "Proverbs and Its Successors," in *Old Testament Interpretation: Past, Present, and Future: Essays in Honor of Gene M. Tucker*, ed. James Luther Mays, David L. Petersen, and Kent Harold Richards (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 163.

teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?" (12:29–30).[49] This passage indicates with pointed clarity the diversity of gifts supplied as well as the unity of the body of believers (cf. Eph 4:11–12). Paul Gardner comments, "Paul is indicating that the body itself is brought into being and designed with its many members as *one* body. This is God's church, and this is the way he chose to build the body."[50] Gardner continues, "The fact is that no one does all these things because no one is given all the necessary gifts by the Spirit."[51]

This is evident for those in pastoral ministry in particular, as Paul writes, "If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task" (1 Tim 3:1). In this way, the pastor himself must be both *spiritually gifted* (Eph 4:11) and *personally interested* in the role (1 Tim 3:1). That all believers are created differently in regard to natural abilities (Matt 25:14–30) and spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:4–11) builds upon the concept of choice in life pursuits by providing freedom and flexibility for each individual to pursue their unique giftedness, interests, and passions.

*Summary*

In light of one's Christian freedom, the flexibility regarding choice in life pursuits, and the variety of abilities and spiritual gifts given by the Lord, perhaps the seminary ought to be intentionally prepared to encourage the student's pursuit of independent learning. This is not to suggest that the Scriptures demand Montessori-style liberty, independence, and autonomy in the learning process, but that these concepts are congruent with a biblical vision of how one might naturally learn best.

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[49] "The questions begin with the word "not" . . . which requires a negative response." Paul Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 550.

[50] Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, 544.

[51] Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, 550.

**Prepared for Spiritual Enrichment**

Chapter 3 proposed that the seminary ought to be intentionally prepared in such a way that is conducive to spiritual growth by providing the opportunity to cultivate spiritual enrichment.[52] This might be accomplished both through the physical layout of the campus as well as the non-academic curriculum. Perhaps the campus may include a chapel or designated prayer room, guided nature trail, excursions to nearby geographic landmarks (mountains, wilderness, lakes, rivers, the ocean), or even showcase historic Christian artwork or biblical manuscripts. With the physical environment prepared as such, there must be an intentional encouragement of the spiritual disciplines: Bible reading, prayer, worship, evangelism, service, stewardship, fasting, and silence and solitude.[53] The goal is that the preparation of the environment for spiritual enrichment might encourage the formation of man by instilling a greater passion for knowing God.

*Bible Reading*

The basis of all other spiritual disciplines is the consumption of the Word of God. About the value of the Bible, the apostle Paul writes, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16–17). That is, the Bible as the Word of God is able to make one wise unto salvation. The psalmist likewise declares, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to

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[52] This is not to minimize the distinction between the seminary as an institution of higher education and the church—which the apostle Paul refers to as "a pillar and buttress of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15)—nor to advocate that seminary can substitute for involvement in the local church. In this approach, the church is understood as the primary context for discipleship. By incorporating various liturgical elements and exercises (the spiritual disciplines), the seminary is able to provide additional avenues for spiritual growth.

[53] With slight modification, this list is largely based on Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991). Among others, see also Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998); Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); Evan B. Howard, The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008); and Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality from Early Martyrs to Modern Missionaries* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007).

my path" (Ps 119:105). Jesus himself proclaims, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matt 4:4). Numerous passages testify to the importance of Scripture to godly living (e.g., Josh 1:8; Ps 1:1–2; 18:30; 19:7–11; Prov 30:5; Isa 40:8; Matt 7:24; Acts 17:11; 2 Tim 2:15; Heb 4:12; Jas 1:22; 2 Pet 2:2). In the largely illiterate first-century culture into which the New Testament was written, Paul writes, "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Tim 4:13; cf. Rev 1:3). Donald Whitney aptly comments, "No Spiritual Discipline is more important than the intake of God's Word. Nothing can substitute for it. There simply is no healthy Christian life apart from a diet of the milk and meat of Scripture."[54] Whitney classifies the subcategories of "Hearing God's Word," "Reading God's Word," and "Studying God's Word," under the larger category of "Bible Intake."[55] The seminary that seeks to encourage spiritual enrichment will take seriously the necessity of Scripture reading, both through providing opportunities for corporate reading and encouraging individual reading and meditation, as well as through developing a culture that prioritizes the Word of God as the final authority in all matters pertaining to life.

*Prayer*

Second to Bible reading, prayer is perhaps the most important spiritual discipline. Throughout Scripture there is an expectation that the believer engages in the discipline of prayer: "Continue steadfastly in prayer" (Col 4:2); "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17); "And when you pray . . ." (Matt 6:5–7); "And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray" (Luke 18:1); "In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil 4:6);

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[54] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 28.

[55] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 29–37.

"Praying at all times in the Spirit" (Eph 6:17); "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight" (Ps 19:14). About prayer, D. A. Carson comments, "One of the foundational steps in knowing God, and one of the basic demonstrations that we do know God, is prayer—spiritual, persistent, biblically minded prayer."[56] The seminary that seeks to encourage spiritual enrichment will cultivate a passion for prayer—corporate and private—that leads students, faculty, and staff to a deep and growing relationship with the Living God through Jesus Christ.

*Worship*

The concept of worship is found throughout the Bible (e.g., Ps 95:6; 150:6; Isa 12:5; Rom 12:1–2; Heb 13:15), perhaps most clearly in John 4:23–24, "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23–24). Whitney defines worship as "the God-centered focus and response of the inner man; it is being preoccupied with God."[57] Both public and private worship are to be the extension and outworking of one's personal devotion to God, ascribing worth, value, and honor unto him. Although it will look quite different depending on the context and campus environment, the seminary that seeks to encourage spiritual enrichment will consistently prioritize the worship of the triune God in the classroom, through campus events, and through church/ministry involvement.

*Evangelism*

The most often cited passage about evangelism in the New Testament is

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[56] D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992), 16.

[57] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 88–89.

Matthew 28:18–19, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." Evangelism, or the proclamation of the gospel message, is an expectation of all believers. Whitney defines it as follows, "Evangelism is to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to sinful people, in order that they may come to put their trust in God through Him, to receive Him as their Savior, and serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His Church."[58] This concept of presenting the message of Jesus Christ to others is woven throughout the New Testament. Paul exhorts Timothy, "Do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim 4:5), and he proclaims to the church at Corinth, "We are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Cor 5:20). This concept of testifying to the salvation offered to all nations by the Living God is found throughout both the Old and New Testaments (e.g., Gen 12:1–3; Isa 6:8; 49:6; Ezek 38:23; Ps 105:1; Matt 5:16; Acts 1:8; 5:42). The seminary that encourages spiritual enrichment will seek both to inspire students to engage in evangelism currently and to develop a life-long passion to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others.

*Service*

Much of the Christian life revolves around serving others as a response to Christ's act of sacrifice. As the apostle John states, "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19; cf. 4:10–11). Although certainly a broad topic, Christian service involves the daily modeling of Jesus's attitude toward others (John 13:12–15; Rom 12:6–13; Phil 2:3–8); it involves loving others as oneself (Lev 19:18; John 13:34; Gal 5:14). In perhaps one of the clearest passages on Christian service, Jesus proclaims,

> "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." Then the righteous will answer him, saying, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and

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[58] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 100.

give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?" And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me." (Matt 25:35–40)

Service involves meeting the needs of others with humility, compassion, kindness, and generosity (cf. Gal 5:22–23). Richard Foster comments, "In some ways we would prefer to hear Jesus's call to deny father and mother, houses and land for the sake of the gospel, than His word to wash feet. Radical self-denial gives the feel of adventure. . . . But in service we are banished to the mundane, the ordinary, the trivial."[59] The seminary that encourages spiritual enrichment will provide genuine opportunities for students to serve each other, the campus community, and the larger community, as well as seek to push students to serve their families, churches, and friends with the love of Christ.

*Stewardship*

The Christian enjoys many good gifts: every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph 1:3; 1 Cor 4:1), time (Eph 5:16; Jas 4:13–14), resources (Deut 16:17; Luke 6:38), family (Ps 127:3; Prov 18:22), friends (Prov 17:17; 18:24), and spiritual gifts (Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:4–11). Christian stewardship is the idea that the believer is to use these gifts wisely (Matt 25:14–30). Paul writes, "It is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy" (1 Cor 4:2). Peter writes, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pet 4:10). Regarding stewardship, Whitney comments, "The clock and the dollar are such substantial factors in so many parts of life that their role must be considered in any serious discussion of Godly living."[60] The Christian is to be a good steward by growing in knowledge, wisdom, and the recognition that all gifts—in particular, time and money—are from the Lord. They are to be used intentionally, not squandered (Luke 12:16–21) or wasted (Eph 5:16). The

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[59] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 110.

[60] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 131.

seminary that encourages spiritual enrichment will provide opportunities for students to learn to be good stewards, both on-campus and off-campus.

*Fasting*

Various fasts are found throughout the Bible. Jesus fasted from all food for "forty days and forty nights" (Matt 4:2; Luke 4:2); Daniel and his companions only had "vegetables to eat and water to drink" (Dan 1:12); Ezra mourned by "neither eating bread nor drinking water" (Ezra 10:6). In the New Testament one reads of private fasts (Matt 6:16–18; 9:15; Acts 9:9) and corporate/congregational fasts (Acts 13:2–3; 14:23). Whitney provides a narrow definition of fasting: "A Christian's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes."[61] He does however, recognize that a broader definition involves the denial of normal functions: "Sometimes we may need to fast from involvement with other people, or from the media, from the telephone, from talking, from sleeping, etc., in order to become more absorbed in a time of spiritual activity."[62] The seminary that encourages spiritual enrichment will provide opportunities for students to engage in fasting as a spiritual discipline.

*Silence and Solitude*

In the Bible, silence and solitude are often found together as transformative spiritual disciplines. Jesus himself often retreated to the wilderness to pray (Matt 4:1; 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 4:42), as did Moses (Exod 33:7–11), Elijah (1 Kgs 19:11–13), and Paul (Gal 1:17). Psalm 46:10 states, "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" In Isaiah 30:15, the Lord proclaims, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength." Whitney provides the following definitions: "Silence is the voluntary and

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[61] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 160.

[62] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 160.

temporary abstention from speaking so that certain spiritual goals might be sought. . . .

Solitude is the Spiritual Discipline of voluntarily and temporarily withdrawing to privacy

for spiritual purposes."[63] Silence and solitude provide the opportunity for reflection

(meditation, journaling, Scripture application, and Scripture memorization); "Let the

words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord,

my rock and my redeemer" (Ps 19:14). The seminary that encourages spiritual

enrichment will seek to provide students with the chance to engage in the disciplines of

silence and solitude both on a regular basis, as well as periodically for lengthier retreat-

style experiences.

*Summary*

As the seminary seeks to provide an environment that is conducive to

transformative growth and learning, it will encourage the spiritual disciplines of Bible

reading, prayer, worship, evangelism, service, stewardship, fasting, and silence and

solitude. The ultimate goal, of course, is not the mastery of these disciplines but the

formation of man. As Paul exhorts his young protégé in 1 Timothy 4:7–8, "Train yourself

for godliness . . . godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present

life and also for the life to come." The disciplines are the means to attain the goal of

being conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). This study

suggests that Montessori's vision of an environment that is prepared for spiritual

enrichment aligns well with the biblical concept of spiritual disciplines.

**Prepared to Replicate Practical Life**

Chapter 3 proposed that the seminary should replicate practical life. It was

suggested that the seminary campus—especially the classroom environment—ought to

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[63] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 184. Whitney continues, "Silence and solitude [are] complementary Disciplines to fellowship. Without silence and solitude we're shallow. Without fellowship we're stagnant. Balance requires them all" (184).

feel less like a traditional school and more like a home. Through sharing meals together and living in intentional community, students might be more fully equipped to love and serve others. Toward this end, practical suggestions might include the administration arranging for students to meet in smaller groups in the homes of professors, or perhaps the replicating of practical life through labor that serves the whole community (splitting firewood, tending a campus garden, etc.). By requiring these activities, the seminary seeks the holistic development of students.

*Community*

Scripture strongly makes the point that humans are relational beings, made in the image of God, designed for community (Gen 1:26–28; 2:18). The doctrine of the Trinity recognizes that there is one God, eternally co-existing in three distinct persons (Matt 28:19–20): the Father (Rom 1:7; 1 Pet 1:3), the Son (John 1:1; Rom 9:5), and the Spirit (Acts 5:3–4; 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). This essential quality—the triune God as relational—is imprinted on all humans (Matt 22:36–40; Rom 12:4–5). About this relational or social element of humans, Gregg Allison comments, "Sociality is the universal human condition of desiring, expressing, and receiving human relationships."[64] This desire is intrinsic in humans; as Allison continues, "We express our sociality by joining with others in community in which we expect to experience unconditional love, steadfast care for one another, the sharing of prayers and burdens, and confession of sin that is met by extending forgiveness."[65] Community is a central element of living as a believer in Christ, as Christians are instructed to continue gathering together (Heb 10:24–25), to carry each other's burdens (Gal 6:2), to help the weak (1 Thess 5:14), to confess sins and pray for each other (Jas 5:16), and to serve with each other (Rom 12:3–8).

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[64] Gregg R. Allison, *Embodied: Living as Whole People in a Fractured World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021), 73.

[65] Allison, *Embodied*, 74.

Ecclesiastes 4:9–10, 12 aptly states, "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! . . . a threefold cord is not quickly broken."

*Mentoring*

Scripture testifies to the importance of mentoring relationships for Christian growth.[66] In Titus 2:2–6, Paul describes how older men (2:2) are to instruct younger men (2:6), and older women (2:3) are to instruct younger women (2:4–5). The pastoral office involves those who are experienced in biblical knowledge and practical wisdom (1 Tim 3:1–7; 2 Tim 2:2; Heb 13:7); the term *elder*, after all, is descriptive primarily of age (1 Pet 5:5; Titus 1:5–9). Throughout Proverbs the concept of mentoring relationships is frequently developed, as is the importance of an abundance of counselors. Proverbs 27:17 states, "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another." Proverbs 15:22 acknowledges, "Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed." Proverbs 13:20 reads, "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise." Additionally, Paul often instructs the readers of his epistles to follow his example, as he follows Christ (Phil 3:17; 4:9; 1 Cor 11:1). This concept of mentoring relationships is central to the concept of Christian growth.

*Summary*

In view of the biblical concepts of Christian community and mentoring, perhaps the seminary ought to intentionally prepare the environment to encourage life-long friendships and relationships. In this way, Montessori's concept of preparing the environment to replicate practical life is quite congruent with the biblical vision of a

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[66] This is not to read the modern concept of formalized mentoring relationships and discipleship programs into the texts of the Old and New Testament.

community of learners who seek to grow in the Lord individually and corporately.

**Conclusion**

It certainly is true that, as Hull acknowledges, many forms of education (traditional or alternative) can be biblically faithful to the Scriptures: "It seems probable to me that a faithful education can express itself in many ways."[67] The aim of this chapter has been to suggest that this is true of the proposed framework for theological higher education built upon Montessori's educational vision. In other words, this chapter has sought to demonstrate the congruence between Montessori's method (adapted to adult learners in a seminary context) and the teachings of historic, orthodox Christianity. As such, it suggests that the following conceptual framework, although not prescribed by Scripture, is consistent with Scripture: *Theological higher education that encourages redemptive formation prioritizes the student's liberty by intentionally preparing the environment beautifully, age-appropriately, for independence, for spiritual enrichment, and to replicate practical life*. Chapter 5 concludes with a consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of this proposed framework for theological higher education.

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[67] John E. Hull, "Aiming for Christian Education, Settling for Christians Educating: The Christian School's Replication of a Public School Paradigm," *Christian Scholars Review* 32, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 222. Hull continues, "The suggestion that Christian education can be faithful without being fundamentally different from public school education could serve as a liberating concept for those weighed down by the responsibility of building a new educational model" (213).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study has proposed the following conceptual framework: *Theological higher education that encourages redemptive formation prioritizes the student's liberty by intentionally preparing the environment beautifully, age-appropriately, for independence, for spiritual enrichment, and to replicate practical life.* Chapter 2 provided the rationale as to why it is developmentally legitimate to adapt Montessori's approach to adult learners in general. Chapter 3 formally proposed the conceptual framework in view of a synthesis of Montessori's writings. Chapter 4 attempted to demonstrate that this proposed framework is congruent with the teachings of Scripture and is therefore a potentially viable option for reform in theological higher education. The aim of this current chapter is to consider advantages and disadvantages of this framework.

**Summary**

Although the goal of theological education is the formation of man (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18), theological educators have often unintentionally embraced the educational assumptions and approach of American public schools and secular universities. It is often assumed that biblical content—without reference to pedagogy and methodology—is sufficient to consider a seminary education transformative.[1] In contrast, this study has suggested that Maria Montessori's educational method is a viable mechanism for school reform that reflects a biblical anthropology and is adaptable to theological education.

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[1] The result is what John E. Hull might refer to as "Christians educating" rather than authentic "Christian education." John E. Hull, "Aiming for Christian Education, Settling for Christians Educating: The Christian School's Replication of a Public School Paradigm," *Christian Scholars Review* 32, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 203–23.

Table 2. Summary of proposed framework

|  | Montessori Methodology | Theological Rationale | Proposed Framework for Theological Education |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Beautifully | "The child should live in an environment of beauty" (Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood*, 183). "We may say that the place best adapted to the life of the man is an artistic environment. . . . We must gather within [the school] things of *beauty*" (Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 110). | God is beautiful and the source of all beauty (Ps 27:4; 50:2; 104:1; Heb 1:3). God has ordained beauty in creation (Gen 1:31; 2:9; Ps 8:3–4; 19:1; Luke 12:27), his recorded revelation, and his ordained architecture (Exod 31:2–6; 1 Kgs 6:29, 32, 35). | The campus (especially classroom) environment must be beautiful; it must evoke a unique delight and aesthetic enjoyment that inculcates a vision of God and his goodness. The student recognizes his frailty and God's majesty. |
| 2. Age-appropriately | Change "must be brought about by giving children the environment that is adapted to their nature" (Montessori, *Childhood Education*, 100). | Scripture recognizes developmental stages (1 Cor 13:11; Luke 2:52) and the value of older training younger (Titus 2:2–6; Prov 20:29). | The environment reflects the latest advancements in developmentally appropriate learning methods. |
| 3. For independence | "Little he cares about the knowledge of others; he wants to acquire a knowledge of his own, to have experience of the world, and to perceive it by his own unaided efforts" (Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 82). | Scripture emphasizes freedom in Christ (Gal 5:1; Rom 8:21), freedom to pursue life choices (Eccl 9:10; Prov 16:9; 19:21), and a variety of spiritual gifts (Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:4–11; cf. Matt 25:14–30). | The environment is prepared to encourage the student's pursuit of independent learning and interest driven exploration. |
| 4. For spiritual enrichment | "Man is a twofold being made up of body and spirit" (Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 154). "The whole room would be fitted up as a sensorial environment calling out to the souls of the little children" (Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 33). | Scripture emphasizes a variety of spiritual disciplines: Bible reading (1 Tim 4:13), prayer (Col 4:2), worship (John 4:23–24), evangelism (Matt 28:18–19), service (Matt 25:35–40), stewardship (1 Cor 4:2) fasting (Matt 6:16–18), and silence and solitude (Ps 46:10). | The environment is prepared in a way conducive to spiritual growth, where spiritual disciplines are cultivated and encouraged. |
| 5. To replicate practical life | "Like the original Children's Houses, [schools] might be instituted in the very buildings inhabited by the parents of the pupils" (Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 107). | Scripture testifies to the importance of living in community (Heb 10:24–25; Gal 6:2; 1 Thess 5:14) and in close relationship with mentors (Titus 2:2–6; Prov 27:17). | The environment is prepared to feel less like a traditional school and more like a home, emphasizing intentional community and life skills. |

Table 2, above, articulates Montessori's educational methodology (chapters 2 and 3), theological rationale (chapter 4), and the proposed framework for theological higher education. As the table demonstrates, this study has attempted to match the *telos* of

theological education ("the formation of man") with the methodology of a Montessori approach to education ("liberty in a prepared environment"), thereby providing an alternative approach to theological higher education.

## Framework Advantages

Several advantages of this proposed conceptual framework are discussed below, followed by a consideration of potential disadvantages.

First, this proposed framework is intentionally holistic, dealing largely with the hidden curriculum. This framework seeks to prepare the environment in such a way that brings about lasting transformation and change in the life of the student. As articulated in chapter 1, "redemptive formation" or "the formation of man" entails that the believer is formed *personally* (to the image of Christ, Rom 8:29), *ethically* (unto a sanctified manner of living, 1 Cor 6:11), *developmentally* (having the mind of Christ, Phil 2:5–8), *spiritually* (as an act of service to God, Rom 12:1–2), and *vocationally* (for readiness in teaching and preaching, 2 Tim 2:2; 4:2). When asked, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" (Matt 22:36), Jesus replies "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment" (Matt 22:37–38; cf. Luke 10:27; Deut 6:5). This proposed framework intentionally seeks to develop love for the Lord with "all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." By keeping the *telos* of the formation of man central, this framework focuses on the intellect, though not exclusively so. It focuses on the cognitive and the affective development of the whole person, including heart, soul, and mind.

Second, this proposed framework focuses intentionally on the unique preparation of the school environment. This is not to say that other theological institutions have not historically desired aesthetically pleasing classrooms and campuses; they certainly have. However, preparation of the environment is seldom purposefully intentional; it is far more often incidental. In this way a seminary may have, for instance,

a beautiful facility. Yet there is often little intentionality behind why the classrooms and campus ought to be beautiful beyond simply attracting and retaining students as it competes with larger secular institutions. This study has suggested that the preparation of the entire learning environment is of considerable importance in evoking lasting change in the lives of students. In this way, the environment (inclusive of both physical classrooms and the campus, as well as curricular and institutional operating procedures) ought to be intentionally well developed. As discussed in chapter 3, this is not at all to say that the institution must spend exorbitantly on its facilities, but that it must pursue excellence with the resources provided. In this way, the small, financially struggling institution may still prepare its facility beautifully, age-appropriately, for independence, for spiritual enrichment, and to replicate practical life. To summarize, one advantage of this proposed framework is the intentionality with which it seeks to achieve the goal of the formation of man. See "Appendix 3: Evaluative Tool Worksheet," for an overview of how seminaries might evaluate their programs in view of this conceptual framework.

Third, this proposed framework addresses current trends in theological higher education and seeks to provide a future path forward. Just as higher education *in general* has experienced seismic changes over the last few decades (with the advent and growth of online education, financial challenges, shrinking student demographics, societal shifts on the value of higher education, fundraising trends, and so forth), so has theological higher education. To remain relevant and to continue to impact the church at large, seminaries must continue to evolve and stay current with the latest advancements. This proposed framework provides a guiding mechanism that reflects a thoroughly biblical anthropology, seeks to develop the whole person (heart, soul, and mind), utilizes a holistic pedagogy, and maintains the *telos* of the formation of man. In an ever-changing world, this proposed framework seeks to provide a viable guiding path forward for seminary education.

**Framework Disadvantages**

Despite the apparent advantages of this proposed framework, there are also several potential disadvantages—or limitations—of this approach worth addressing. At the very least, these issues raise questions that must be addressed in the future.

First, this proposed framework is undoubtedly expensive, especially related to the necessity of a beautiful campus and intentionally prepared classrooms. Even if a seminary desires to move toward this goal, it will take a significant commitment of the annual budget and other resources. This is certainly not insurmountable—as the seminary can take small, manageable steps toward this end—but it must be acknowledged.

Second, this proposed framework raises potential difficulties (at least issues that must be addressed by each institution individually) for accreditation. This is not to suggest that modern accrediting agencies (theological accreditors such as ATS, ABHE, TRACS, or regional accreditors) would be opposed to this conceptual framework. However, one key element of accreditation is assessment. Although assessment through formal exams is easily measurable, it is more difficult to accurately measure and thereby assess spiritual formation and the accompanying disciplines. For example, developing the environment to encourage independence likely involves the reforming of a number of assessment tools (e.g., the Montessori-styled seminary would likely employ few formal tests—at least not multiple choice or true/false) to more individualized projects that encourage students to direct their own educational path. Individualized projects, however, are notoriously difficult to assess from a standardized benchmark or rubric.

Third, this proposed framework is more conducive with certain delivery modes. One would be hard-pressed to "prepare the environment" in an online-only, asynchronous course setting. This is not to say that certain elements could not be incorporated (one thinks of preparing the environment *beautifully* in that the online course page and syllabus is well organized and aesthetically pleasing, preparing the environment *for independence* in that students have choice and freedom in selecting a

final project, and so forth). Yet in some ways, the online Montessori-styled seminary is likely an oxymoron, an impossible contradiction of terms, as each element of Montessori's triad (student–liberty; environment–prepared; teacher–guide) is inseparable from the others. If content transfer is the goal, then online education is sufficient. Yet if the formation of man is the goal, online education is at best, inferior. In this way, it is likely the case that the Montessori-styled seminary could only be available through either full-time residential study or perhaps through a modified-residential approach. In a society, however, where accessibility and convenience are treasured, the absence of an online seminary option immediately limits the potential pool of student applicants.

Fourth, this proposed framework requires a different approach to teacher preparation. In the traditional approach, a seminary professor receives formal training likely through a PhD program in a given subject (Old Testament, New Testament, Church History, Systematic Theology, etc.). At the conclusion of the program, he or she has mastered a specific theological discipline. However, training for Montessori-styled seminary professors demands not only this level of rigor, but also extensive training in pedagogy and teaching methodology. These professors must be more than content experts who are able to lecture on specific areas of expertise; they must be well-rounded individuals, well-versed in effective teaching methods, firmly grounded in their walk with Christ, passionate about encouraging spiritual formation, and eager to invest in the lives of students. In the words of Montessori, "The vision of the teacher should be at once precise like that of the scientist, and spiritual like that of the saint."[2]

## Avenues for Further Study and Potential Applications

As a result of this proposed conceptual framework, there are several potential avenues for further study.

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[2] Maria Montessori, *The Advanced Montessori Method*, Montessori Series 9 (Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson, 2016), 104.

1. *Adult learners in post-secondary education*. It would be worthwhile to consider and develop a full-orbed approach to Montessori education for adult learners specific to post-secondary education. This was initially attempted in chapter 2, "Engaging Montessori's Educational Model for Adult Learners." However, this topic could be a dissertation all of its own. It is easier to adapt the Montessori approach to a specific subset of adults, as attempted with this study, especially when the *telos* matches closely between theological higher education and Montessori's stated objectives.

2. *Adult learners in the church*. This study has considered how Maria Montessori's educational approach might be adapted by the evangelical seminary. As a devout Roman Catholic, Montessori's approach finds many similarities to the Catholic church. One avenue of further study would be to consider how Montessori education might be broadly adapted by the evangelical church. Although there have been appropriations and adaptations of Montessori's method for childhood education in the church (e.g., Sofia Cavalletti, Jerome Berryman),[3] there have been no considerations of how her approach might be developed for adult learners in the church.

3. *Multi-case study analysis*. The difference between a Montessori-styled seminary and a traditional seminary might be empirically considered/examined in a multi-case study analysis. Although no evangelical seminary currently employs the framework proposed in this study, certain elements could be identified in a variety of institutions and compared against those of more traditional institutions. The goal would be to determine the long-term value of this specific educational approach over and against other educational approaches. Perhaps a qualitative or mixed-methods study would assist in demonstrating the value of intentionally preparing the environment. Perhaps the most straightforward approach would be a multi-case study analysis, though

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[3] See Alair August, "A Theological Analysis of the Educational Method of Maria Montessori Using an Inverse Consistency Protocol" (EdD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023), especially chapter 3.

other options are certainly viable (e.g., perhaps a Delphi study with a panel of administrators and faculty, or even a panel of students and graduates). Equivalent courses (e.g., Old Testament, New Testament, systematic theology) or programs (e.g., MDiv, MA in Theological Studies), taken at two different institutions might be compared side-by-side to determine if one approach appears more effective.

4. *Immersive cohort of Montessori-styled seminary*. An established seminary might designate a specific program in a certain department to have its own immersive curriculum styled after the approach advocated in this study (e.g., an MDiv or ThM program tailored to a specific group or cohort). This initial trial could serve as the sample for a small case study, where results and outcomes would be compared and contrasted from students enrolled in a traditional curriculum.

5. *Individual courses*. Individual professors might attempt to incorporate elements of the proposed framework in their own classroom (e.g., taking the class to a beautiful destination, allowing choice in the final project, including assignment options for spiritual growth—such as Scripture memory, journaling, time spent in nature, meditation, or silence and solitude). Of course, this limits the overarching institutional program, yet it is perhaps the most immediate way to see change in student results and outcomes. Course evaluations may be helpful in considering the success of such an approach. See "Appendix 1: Traditional / Montessori Syllabus," for an example of what an individual course that incorporates this conceptual framework might entail in a traditional academic environment. See "Appendix 2: Montessori Syllabus," for an example of an individual course that incorporates this conceptual framework in a less traditional manner, built more closely on the proposed conceptual framework.

6. *Theological field education*. Especially related to the focus of replicating practical life, each course—or at the very least, most courses—ought to require significant field education. This would involve revising each course accordingly and would require students to complete projects or log hours where their academic pursuits

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are matched with practical ministry. Related to accreditors, such as ATS (cf. also ATFE, Association for Theological Field Education), the Montessori-styled seminary would allow student flexibility in demonstrating proficiency through student-selected options such as academic teaching, church-based preaching, personal ministry, counseling opportunities, or perhaps even more creative and artistic projects. Weaving one's personally selected academic pursuits with practical ministry opportunities under the tutelage of a mentor-professor is prioritized in the Montessori-styled seminary. By utilizing an evaluative or assessment tool (see "Appendix 3: Evaluative Tool Worksheet"), the seminary's theological field education hours might be intentionally focused so as to provide richer and more effective field education.

7. *Online seminary education*. As above, the Montessori-styled seminary is largely limited in such a way that involves at least some residential on-campus component. One avenue for further study, though, might be developing how certain distance-learning programs might be enhanced with opportunities for students to intentionally prepare their own environment. Examples are numerous and many are already used in various educational programs: working with a field-experience mentor, requiring international ministry trips, spending time praying and meditating in nature, or submitting journals. In this way, although the student might never set foot on the seminary campus or in a physical classroom, key pedagogical techniques are employed to maximize student learning.

**Conclusion**

In summary, this study proposes the following conceptual framework: *Theological higher education that encourages redemptive formation prioritizes the student's liberty by intentionally preparing the environment beautifully, age-appropriately, for independence, for spiritual enrichment, and to replicate practical life.* This study has sought to address current trends of theological higher education with a

potentially viable mechanism for institutional reform, namely the Montessori method. Although few studies have considered the value of Montessori education for adult learners, due to Montessori's convictional Christian (Roman Catholic) theological beliefs, she serves as one of the few widely accepted theorists to have developed a fully-formed educational model that is built on biblical anthropology. This makes her an intriguing— though often overlooked—candidate for evangelical consideration.

Since the goal of intellectual exercise ought to result in a call to action, may this be so with this current study. May we, as theological educators, continue to take serious the charge given by the apostle Paul, "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2). As we do so, may we impart not only our theology (explicit curriculum), but also our educational pedagogy (hidden curriculum) rooted as it is, after all, in our theology.

APPENDIX 1

TRADITIONAL / MONTESSORI SYLLABUS

**Course Title:**

BIB501 New Testament Literature (3 credit hours)

**Schedule and Location:**

The class meets fifteen times over the semester for a three-hour block, once a week. Enrollment is capped at twelve students to intentionally encourage discussion.[1] The classroom is adjacent to the campus library and is intentionally designed.[2]

**Course Description:**

This course aims to cultivate a love for God and his written Word, that students might be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18).[3] Through devotional exercises and vocational practices, this course explores the themes, main teachings, and contributions of each New Testament book, from Matthew to Revelation. Special focus is given to the historical setting and cultural context of the New Testament writings.

**Learning Objectives:**

This course is designed to be highly interactive in the study of the New Testament writings, their contributions, and their theological implications.[4] A seminar-styled format is employed to encourage interest-driven exploration and collaborative encouragement

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[1] "What we all desire for ourselves, namely . . . to have good friends ready to help us in times of need, to see them rejoice with us, to be on terms of equality with them, to be able to confide and trust in them—this is what we need for happy companionship." Montessori, *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook*, 132–3.

[2] "The whole room would be fitted up as a sensorial environment calling out to the souls of the little children." Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 33. "The child should live in an environment of beauty." Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood*, 183.

[3] "Its object is to influence the whole life of the child: it aims, in short, at a total development of the personality, a harmonious growth of all the potentialities of the child, physical and mental, according to the law of its being." Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 140–41.

[4] "Let us seek to implant in the soul the self-sacrificing spirit of the scientist with the reverent love of the disciple of Christ, and we shall have prepared the spirit of the teacher." Montessori, *The Montessori Method*, 13.

toward spiritual formation.[5] The student who fully engages in this learning process will be able to . . .

1. Articulate the theological message and distinctives of the four Gospels, Acts, and the New Testament Epistles.
2. Describe Old Testament / Jewish theological expectations and the first-century Greco-Roman history / cultural background.
3. Summarize the chronology of the New Testament times, including Jesus' life and the ministry of the apostles / early church.
4. Responsibly critique the history of interpretation of select New Testament writings.
5. Apply themes of the New Testament writings to life in a manner that drives growth in one's walk with God, renewed commitment to the cause of Christ, and dependence on the Holy Spirit.

**Readings:**

Gary M. Burge and Gene L. Green. *The New Testament in Antiquity: A Survey of the New Testament within Its Cultural Contexts*, 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020.

Paul Barnett. *Jesus & The Rise of Early Christianity: A History of New Testament Times*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999.

C. S. Lewis. *Perelandra*. New York: Scribner, 2003 (reprint, 1943).[6]

**Assignments:**

*Reading*—The student is required to read the New Testament writings as well as the assigned portions of the textbooks, according to the course schedule. (LO 1, 2, 3)

*Reading Reflections*—As in interactive, seminar-styled course, it is imperative that students come prepared, having read the assigned passage(s) and interacted with the

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[5] "A prepared environment, a life of peace, the required concentration for meditation and contemplation, mastery over the body, silence, the same exercises repeated from day to day. The monks have produced the greatest heroes, namely the saints, those who were ready for every strife, struggles against temptation, endurance, martyrdom. Such heroes are not formed by heated speeches, nor by sounding the trumpet of war; on the contrary they have traversed the noiseless road of formation." Montessori, "The Child in the Church," 106–7.

[6] C. S. Lewis's book *Perelandra* has been selected for the purpose of encouraging students to wrestle with major theological themes from a different vantage point. *Perelandra* provides the opportunity to consider the Adam/Christ contrast by means of the key themes in Lewis's fantasy/science fiction writing. The goal is, as with each element of the course, the formation of man. "Men with hands and no head, and men with head and no hands are equally out of place in the modern community." Montessori, *From Childhood to Adolescence*, 58.

implications prior to class.[7] Questions are provided to focus student reflections. Reading reflections consist of one double-spaced page interaction with the text and application for the student's life.[8] Students will conclude by posing two questions to ask in class discussion. Reading reflections are to be submitted prior to the beginning of class. (LO 1, 4, 5)

*Exams*—There are two exams during the semester, the midterm and final. The exams are based on lecture notes, class discussion, and required reading. (LO 1, 2, 3, 4)

*Capstone Project*—In consultation with the professor, each student will complete a capstone project reflecting what has been learned throughout the semester (class lectures, discussion, and reading). Projects can take a wide range of forms and are best seen as tools for helping others engage with the New Testament writings and their implications.[9] Students are encouraged to complete a project that can be used in their unique ministry setting. Further details are provided in class. Options include (but are not limited to): (LO 1, 5).

— Plan curriculum for Bible study series on a Gospel or a selected epistle.
— Memorize two sequential chapters from the New Testament.
— Complete a 7-to-10-page exegetical research paper on a selected passage.
— Manuscript and preach/teach a selected passage.
— Develop a video overview of a New Testament book.
— Creative art (music, poetry, pottery, etc.) is always a welcomed suggestion.[10]

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[7] "Our little ones have the impression of continually 'making discoveries' in the world about them; and in this they find the greatest joy." Montessori, *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook*, 130.

[8] "We discovered that education is not something which the teacher does, but that it is a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being. It is not acquired by listening to words, but in virtue of experiences in which the child acts on his environment. The teacher's task is not to talk, but to prepare and arrange a series of motives for cultural activity in a special environment for the child." Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 5.

[9] "Little he cares about the knowledge of others; he wants to acquire a knowledge of his own, to have experience of the world, and to perceive it by his own unaided efforts." Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 82.

[10] "We may say that the place best adapted to the life of man is an artistic environment; and that, therefore, if we want the school to become 'a laboratory for the observation of human life,' we must gather within it things of *beauty*." Montessori, *Advanced Montessori Method*, 110.

**Course Calendar:**

| Week | Topic | Assignment Due |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | New Testament Backgrounds | |
| 2 | Old Testament Expectations | Reading Reflection #1 |
| 3 | Matthew, Mark | Reading Reflection #2 |
| 4 | Luke, John | Reading Reflection #3 |
| 5 | Acts and the Early Church | Reading Reflection #4 |
| 6 | Overview of Paul's Ministry | Reading Reflection #5 |
| 7 | **Midterm Exam** | |
| 8 | Paul's Letters | Reading Reflection #6 |
| 9 | Paul's Letters | Reading Reflection #7 |
| 10 | Paul's Letters | Reading Reflection #8 |
| 11 | Hebrews | Reading Reflection #9 |
| 12 | James, Peter, Jude | Reading Reflection #10 |
| 13 | John's Letters | Reading Reflection #11 |
| 14 | Revelation | Reading Reflection #12 |
| 15 | Revelation | Capstone Project |
| FINALS | **Final Exam** | Final Exam |

APPENDIX 2

MONTESSORI SYLLABUS

**Course Title:**

BIB501 New Testament Literature (3 credit hours)

**Course Topic:**

This course explores the themes, main teachings, and contributions of each New Testament book, from Matthew to Revelation.

**Course *Telos*:**

The formation of the student, *personally* (to the image of Christ, Rom 8:29), *ethically* (unto a sanctified manner of living, 1 Cor 6:11), *developmentally* (having the mind of Christ, Phil 2:5–8), *spiritually* (as an act of service to God, Rom 12:1–2), and *vocationally* (for readiness in teaching and preaching, 2 Tim 2:2; 4:2).

**Course Framework:**

Theological higher education that encourages redemptive formation prioritizes the student's liberty by intentionally preparing the environment (1) *beautifully*, (2) *age-appropriately*, (3) *for independence*, (4) *for spiritual enrichment*, and (5) *to replicate practical life*.

|  | Framework for Theological Education | Learning Exercises for New Testament Literature |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Beautifully | The campus (especially classroom) environment must be beautiful; it must evoke a unique delight and aesthetic enjoyment that inculcates a vision of God and his goodness. The student recognizes his frailty and God's majesty. | • Students will meet in an intentionally designed classroom adjacent to the campus library for lecture, discussion, prayer, and reflection on the text of the NT. |
| 2. Age-appropriately | The environment reflects the latest advancements in developmentally appropriate learning methods. | • In a seminar format, students will responsibly critique the history of interpretation of select NT writings. |

|  | Framework for<br>Theological Education | Learning Exercises<br>for New Testament Literature |
|---|---|---|
| 3. For independence | The environment is prepared to encourage the student's pursuit of independent learning and interest driven exploration. | • Students will select a specific NT topic to study at further depth, ultimately producing a capstone project unique to his/her ministry setting. |
| 4. For spiritual enrichment | The environment is prepared in a way conducive to spiritual growth, where spiritual disciplines are cultivated and encouraged. | • Students will articulate and devotionally consider (through the spiritual disciplines) the theological message and distinctives of the four Gospels, Acts, and the NT Epistles. |
| 5. To replicate practical life | The environment is prepared to feel less like a traditional school and more like a home, emphasizing intentional community and life skills. | • Students will be vocationally equipped to communicate the message of Scripture with greater accuracy (particularly in regard to the historical and cultural context, as well as the chronology of Jesus' life and the ministry of the apostles). |

**Course Liturgy:**

With slight adjustments, each class meeting will be structured as follows . . .

1. Silent meditation (a question is posed on the board)
2. Opening prayer
3. Corporate reading of scripture (to be studied in class)
4. Each student shares answers and insights to question posed on board
5. Professor's interactive lecture
6. Silent meditation and completion of interactive assignment
7. Submission of "exit ticket"

**Course Readings:**

From a course bibliography, each student will read a different introduction to the NT textbook. This will be read in conjunction with the student's course reflections throughout the semester. In consultation with the professor, the student will select additional resources to be used in the development of the course capstone project.

**Course Reflections:**

As in interactive, seminar-styled course, it is imperative that students come prepared, having read the assigned passage(s) and interacted with the implications prior to class. Questions are provided to focus student reflections.

Course reflections consist of one double-spaced page interaction with the text and application for the student's life. Students will conclude by posing two questions to ask in class discussion. Course reflections are to be submitted prior to the beginning of class.

**Course Capstone:**

In consultation with the professor, each student will complete a capstone project reflecting what has been learned throughout the semester (class lectures, discussion, and reading). Projects can take a wide range of forms and are best seen as tools for helping others engage with the NT writings and their implications. Students are encouraged to complete a project that can be used in their unique ministry setting. Further details are provided in class. Options include (but are not limited to):

- Plan curriculum for Bible study series on a Gospel or a selected epistle.
- Memorize two sequential chapters from the NT.
- Complete a 7-to-10-page exegetical research paper on a selected passage.
- Manuscript and preach/teach a selected passage.
- Develop a video overview of a NT book.
- Creative art (music, poetry, pottery, etc.) is always a welcomed suggestion.

# APPENDIX 3

## EVALUATIVE TOOL WORKSHEET

|  | Proposed Framework for Theological Education | Sample Questions for Campus and Curriculum | Evaluation Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Beautifully | The campus (especially classroom) environment must be beautiful; it must evoke a unique delight and aesthetic enjoyment that inculcates a vision of God and his goodness. The student recognizes his frailty and God's majesty. | • Is the exterior campus architecturally beautiful?<br>• Are the interior classrooms aesthetically beautiful?<br>• Is the campus architecture geographically and culturally sensitive? |  |
| 2. Age-appropriately | The environment reflects the latest advancements in developmentally appropriate learning methods. | • Are effective educational methods employed in course instruction?<br>• Is the classroom environment designed for adult learners? |  |
| 3. For independence | The environment is prepared to encourage the student's pursuit of independent learning and interest driven exploration. | • Does the student have ample input in designing their own course of study?<br>• Does the campus provide physical space (e.g., library, office) for independent study? |  |
| 4. For spiritual enrichment | The environment is prepared in a way conducive to spiritual growth, where spiritual disciplines are cultivated and encouraged. | • Is spiritual formation a focus of each course, embedded in syllabi?<br>• Is the campus environment and student life experience conducive for spiritual growth (e.g., chapel, prayer walk)? |  |
| 5. To replicate practical life | The environment is prepared to feel less like a traditional school and more like a home, emphasizing intentional community and life skills. | • Is community life with peers and faculty prioritized?<br>• Is theological field education embedded in the seminary program? |  |

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ABSTRACT

MONTESSORI GOES TO SEMINARY: ESTABLISHING A
FRAMEWORK FOR REDEMPTIVE FORMATION IN
THEOLOGICAL HIGHER EDUCATION

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This study addresses current trends in theological higher education by proposing a potentially viable mechanism for institutional reform, namely the Montessori method. Although Maria Montessori is widely known as an early childhood educator, this study suggests that her approach aligns quite well with the *telos* of theological education, the formation of man. Based on Montessori's educational approach, this study proposes the following conceptual framework: Theological higher education that encourages redemptive formation prioritizes the student's liberty by intentionally preparing the environment beautifully, age-appropriately, for independence, for spiritual enrichment, and to replicate practical life.

Chapter 1 overviews current trends in theological higher education and suggests that Montessori's educational approach may provide the means for institutional reform. Chapter 2 analyzes Montessori's primary source writings to present the core of her educational model and why it can be adapted to adult education. Chapter 3 formally proposes the conceptual framework for theological higher education that encourages redemptive formation. Chapter 4 assesses the proposed framework from Scripture, based on a historic, orthodox Christian perspective. Chapter 5 concludes by considering the advantages and disadvantages of this proposed framework.

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