



*Summertime and the livin is easy...*

Porgy and Bess

Theological Field Educators do and don't live by the academic calendar. Yes, it's true there is the rhythm of the beginning the middle and the end of each term. But, there are also summer assignments to be checked in on, site visits and recruitment of placement sites. Some of us find that the summer months provide some of the best occasions for training our peer group facilitators, mentors for students and – oh yes, finding time for personal renewal.

In whatever form that may come for you: a good read, a good hike, a good road trip; may this be a season of personal renewal that will allow you to return to the *rhythm* with energy and passion for your special ministry.

A number of our colleagues have written abstracts of books that just might provide the material your looking for to inform a professional development retreat at your favorite summer haunt. Enjoy!

Contributions should be approximately 200 words in length and sent to [matt.floding@westernsem.org](mailto:matt.floding@westernsem.org) The editorial board reserves the right to select and edit contributions to be published. An annual index will be published and printable copies of past issues of *TFEA* will be archived at [www.westernsem.org](http://www.westernsem.org)

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*Confessions of a Beginning Theologian* by Elouise Renich Fraser, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998. 132 pages. ISBN 0-83081519-8

Desiring to help pave the way for those who have felt inhibited or not welcomed at the table of theological dialogue, Fraser invites her readers to reflect on her personal story as a theological tome in progress. The spirit of Augustine is alive and well as she transparently recounts her journey out of a fundamentalist tradition through seminary (Fuller), graduate school (Vanderbilt) and eventually to her role of Professor of Theology (Eastern Baptist). Fraser's readers are presented with multiple insights into how regional and church culture, gender, life-stage development, health and family demands influence and set the pace for one's theological development. Fraser's story becomes a mirror, which invites readers both to understand their own theological development and also becomes a personal guide in articulating the unique message of one's own journey. Like the author, students are encouraged to overcome their fears of being wrong, acting imperfectly, being misunderstood and even ignored. Her passionate plea to her readers, likely to be students of theology, is that they understand and even celebrate that they are all works in progress (beginners) as they wrestle with the meaning of scripture and discern just how God continues to seek and find them in Jesus. This is an autobiographical theological reflection that demands a deep response from her readers. Those desiring to restrict the doing of theology to a cognitive realm will not find Fraser easy to stomach. Her persuasive argument is that to the extent that we learn to "speak with our own voices" our faith communities cannot help but be enriched. This process is dependent on our honest representation of our true selves as we seek to determine how God is encountering us at all of life's junctures.

-Kent A. Eaton

*Congregation: The Journey Back to Church* by Gary Dorsey, Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1998. 388 pages. ISBN 0-8298-1296-2.

Award-winning journalist Gary Dorsey offers a fascinating account of an experience which began as objective journalism and quickly became an occasion for personal transformation. Raised in and later rejecting the Southern Revivalist tradition, Dorsey spent his young adulthood in a seeking mode. As Dorsey approached mid-life, "the Church became an object of intense curiosity for [him]." (7) He decided to "journey back to church," though "not as a seeker but as a journalist." (8) As a journalist-ethnographer, Dorsey set out to observe and provide a literary "thick description" of the everyday, ordinary, even mundane life of a particular society—in this case, the New England mainline congregation of First Church, Windsor, Connecticut where the Reverend Fletcher Van Gorder Parker presided. As a participant-observer, Dorsey engaged in the ordinary life of the church's ministries and outreach, which ultimately intersected with Dorsey's own personal, marital, and spiritual crises, and led him to spiritual transformation and authentic faith.

This book is not about journalistic objectivity and so *Congregation* may be read with an eye toward the systemic processes whereby personal transformation occurs. I have used this book for several semesters in the M.Div. senior seminar. In most cases, the students express much enthusiasm for the new insights gained with respect to their own congregations and spiritual journeys. This book can be read through the lens of congregational systems theory as well as utilized as a case study in basic field education courses.

-Tarris D. Rosell

*Experiencing Ministry Supervision, A Field-Based Approach*, by William T. Pyle and Mary Alice Seals, Editors, Broadman and Holman Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee, 1995, 149 pages. ISBN 0-8054-1163-1

This book is written by a number of Baptist Field Educators working in 6 different seminaries with students in formation for ministry. It is designed for and addressed directly to the students who are preparing for their first ministry experiences with the assistance of a supervisor. This is a "How To" book that inspires, encourages, and offers practical suggestions to the students as they organize their field placement, try to optimize their ministry experience and maximize their learning opportunities in partnership with the supervisor, lay committee, and community of ministry. The nine practical chapters describe and offer well tried suggestions about the various aspects of the supervised ministry experience. The chapters are enriched by a clarifying glossary as well as appendix 1 that highlights Assessment Instrument Descriptions and appendix 2 that offers a model Verbatim Report.

Chapter 3 on Vocational Discernment is especially helpful to some students because it clarifies and offers examples of the relationship and difference between the statements of Call, Values, Mission, Vision and "Dreams-Wants-Needs". It also offers good suggestions on the naming of goals, activities and evaluation possibilities. Chapter 7 on Tools for Data gathering is very clear about possibilities for naming, reflecting on and then reporting the lived ministry experience. Chapter 8 on Theological Reflection outlines well the process of reflection of the Whiteheads and offers practical suggestions for its practice. All chapters are helpful for students who want to engage well the supervised ministry experience.

-Colleen Mahoney

*First, We Must Listen: Living in a Multicultural Society* by Anne Leo Ellis, ed., New York: Friendship Press, 1996. 123 pages. ISBN: 0-377-00302-6

Drawing upon the reflections of a rich cadre of ministers and theologians from a variety of ethnic and confessional backgrounds, Ellis begins by reminding those engaged in ministry in North America of the multicultural reality that characterizes ministry today. Secondly, she demonstrates the

necessity of exploring ways to advance together as God's people doing God's work. While not downplaying the complex realities she argues that a culturally sensitive Christian community can seize this extraordinary opportunity by welcoming the stranger as well as personally benefit through being enriched by the experience and insights of others. If we are able to gain a fuller appreciation of the beauty and strength of each culture, our churches and lives will become like an "incredible mosaic." In order to grow into this beautiful image Ellis advocates learning to truly listen to the stories of others. Listening is defined as carefully and compassionately attending to the accounts of pain, anger, frustration and dismay of those who have suffered due to the systemic racism that still characterizes our culture and churches. The first part of the book concentrates on the individual stories of those who have been excluded and marginalized. The authors contend that few European North Americans are able to comprehend this reality. Through autobiographies, part two of the book looks back to remind the readers of our countries' disgraceful history of dealing with non-Europeans in North America. Part three provides the demographic support for understanding North America as a multicultural society. In part four some key biblical themes that shape and inform a theology of multiculturalism are briefly discussed. Likely the most challenging section of the book is part five in which readers are reminded that the principal obstacles for Christian solidarity are both personal and systemic. The book ends with a positive note as several churches from a variety of locations and confessions that have successfully transitioned into multicultural communities share their stories.

-Kent A. Eaton

*From Beginning to End: The Rituals of Our Lives* by Robert Fulghum, New York: Ballantine Books, 1996. 279 pages. ISBN 0-8041-1114-6.

Best known for his earlier work, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* (1989), here Robert Fulghum maintains his entertaining narrative style as he focuses on ritualized behavior in everyday life.

Fulghum claims that "[f]rom beginning to end, the rituals of our lives shape each hour, day, and year. Everyone leads a ritualized life." (v) Calling readers to be mindful of their own repetitive actions, he notes that ritual behavior is not just repetitive and patterned but potentially meaningful as well. His approach resembles popularized phenomenology in that he first sees, understands, and then describes a variety of everyday life rituals in a way that has enrichment potential even for the everyday lay reader.

This book is useful for field education in three ways. First: Although the book is written for wider audience, Fulghum's pastoral perspective on ritual is appropriate to the teaching goals of field education. He himself served for many years as a parish minister and his interest in ritual emerges out of that experience.

Secondly: The rituals found in this book include creative versions of several standard ritual practices of ministry. As well as including rituals of birthing and baptism, Fulghum offers his own experimental approaches to a wedding rite as well as communion services. As he addresses the rituals of dying and death, readers are faced with their own mortal finitude—a necessary experience for those who are preparing to lead dying or bereaved congregants in meaningful religious rituals.

And thirdly: This book ends with a useful set of appendices entitled “References and Resources.” Relevant bibliographic annotations are supplemented by health directive forms and others pertaining to post-mortem matters.

- Tarris D. Rosell

*The Holy Longing: The Search for Christian Spirituality* by Ronald Rolheiser, New York: Doubleday, 1999. 257 pages. ISBN 0-385-49418-1

Many students come to seminary hungry for a deeper experience of the spiritual life yet find their life with God crowded to the margins during the course of their academic study. At the same time, many students field questions from friends and neighbors about diverse understandings and expressions of the meaning of spirituality. Ronald Rolheiser provides a valuable resource for all persons wanting both clarity and inspiration in the area of spirituality. He defines spirituality as what each person does with the desire or the unrest that burns within. Spirituality that is specifically Christian is based on the incarnation and is defined by four nonnegotiable essentials: private prayer and private morality; social justice; mellowness of heart and spirit; and community as a constitutive element of true worship. Rooted in the Gospel, *The Holy Longing* is a meaningful companion to theological study.

-Barbara Mutch

*How The Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work: Seven Languages for Transformation* by Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001. 256 pages. ISBN: 0-7879-5535-3

As the title suggests, this book is about transformation, individual and communal transformation.

Harvard psychologists, Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey combine their accumulation of much research, wisdom and solid experience to enhance our capacity for deep structural change. In their focus on the formative nature of language, they recognize that work settings are essentially language communities and the leaders of those work settings have opportunities to influence the language, which shapes and transforms both personally and

collectively. They call on leaders to intentionally claim their role as language leaders as catalysts and sustainers of new social arrangements.

If we take our leadership role seriously, we will not be able to simply read this book. In other words, this book is not about learning a theory. Given my own experience with this book, you will engage in the exercises built into the seven-language technology. The first four languages are designed as the technology to transform customary mental arrangements, moving us from a language of complaint to a language of commitment, exposing the big assumptions that keep us from change. The last three languages transform customary social arrangements, and are designed to sustain and even upgrade the technology of the first four languages.

Warning to pastoral educators: Don't be fooled by all this jargon around technology. Although this book could easily be mistaken for another one of the endless self-help books, which offer techniques and quick fixes, it is aimed at anyone who has a vested interest in transformational learning, their own as well as that of others. Theological field education and ministry formation are about transformational learning and this book makes an excellent contribution to our own professional development in this field.

-Lorraine Ste-Marie

*Listening Ministry: Rethinking Pastoral Leadership* Susan K. Hedahl, Fortress Press, Mpls, MN 2001. 136 pages. ISBN 0-8006-3174-9

Before reading Susan K. Hedahl's book *Listening Ministry: Rethinking Pastoral Leadership*, I read these remarks in an article entitled "The Act of Listening" by Donner Atwood, a Hospice Director in the Allina Hospice Training Manual, 2002.

"We listen with many unconscious feelings which color everything the speaker says: our own unfaced fears, evaded decisions, repressed longings and hidden aspirations."

Imagine receiving reflective guidance on listening creatively and effectively to a congregations' members unfaced fears and evaded decisions on ministry and mission. Personal and professional experience informs us that listening is a core skill for all interpersonal relationships. Moreover, as Hedahl's title asserts, listening is a core skill for pastoral leadership. Hedahl invites us to consider a theology of listening using a taxonomical arrangement of the types of listening. The taxonomy developed by two communication scholars for their instruction on listening is comprised of discriminative, comprehensive, therapeutic, critical and appreciative. In developing a theology of listening, Hedahl addresses the reader with the biblical, liturgical, historical, theological, homiletically and contemplative forms of ecclesial listening that agree and contrast to the listening modes developed by the communication scholars.

Challenged by my own struggle to listen effectively and creatively, Hedahl has lead to me rethink critically and appreciatively the need to develop my leadership in theological education through a theology of listening.

-Sharon F. Kelly

*Ministry and Community--Recognizing, Healing and Preventing Ministry Impairment* by Len Sperry, Colleagueville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000. 124 pages. ISBN 0-8146-2723-4

As problems of ministry impairment become more apparent in the Church, Len Sperry's work takes on increasing importance. Considered a "must read" book for anyone in ministry who wants to help rather than hurt or be hurt by wounded people, *Ministry and Community* is particularly pertinent for those in positions of authority who are charged with screening ministry candidates and preparing them for various ministries.

As a practicing clinical psychiatrist specializing in the treatment of ministry personnel and consultation to Church communities—religious orders, parishes, professional religious organizations, and diocese—Dr. Sperry has applied the best insights in his field to persons who minister in the Church.

*Ministry and Community* examines the personality and supporting organizational dynamics of eight of the most common forms of impairment in ministry personnel--narcissistic, sexual-abusing, psychopathic, borderline, depressive, obsessive-compulsive, manic-depressive and passive-aggressive behaviors—as well as how they can be recognized, treated, and prevented. Further, Dr. Sperry provides suggestions including specific criterion for determining fitness for ministry, guidelines for realistically appraising ministry performance, and specific indications and contraindications for psychotherapy and other psychiatric intervention.

-Suzette Phillips

*Sorting It Out: Discerning God's Call to Ministry.* Alice R. Cullinan, Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999. 117pp. ISBN 0-8170-1302-4

Cullinan unpacks the understanding of call articulated by H. Richard Niebuhr in nine chapters heavily illustrated from her own experience with students as a professor in the religion department of Gardner-Webb University. Niebuhr's scheme considers call from four angles of vision: 1) the call to discipleship to Jesus, the call of every Christian, 2) the secret call, a subjective experience of being called or summoned to the work of the ministry, 3) the providential call, an alignment of aptitude, abilities, and spiritual drive with the circumstances of need and 4) the ecclesiastical call, which comes from a specific church or institution inviting an individual to serve there (5). Cullinan explicates these in a natural progression: defining, experiencing and discerning God's call (chapters 1-3). She then proceeds to practical considerations like effectiveness and expectations, and when a call is not a call to ordained ministry (chapters 4-5).

Cullinan has produced a book that will be especially helpful for college and university students wrestling with their sense of calling, particularly if the book were used in a small group setting. Theological field educators, directors of admissions and others who counsel with prospective students would find this a helpful resource.

-Matthew Floding

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