

Beyond 2000: The Global World and Theological Education

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Abstract: This article offers an outline of the major challenges to theological education at the end of the millennium. The challenge of religious pluralism and the problem of denominational identity are given particular attention. Future theological education is anticipated also to demand greater attention to a new sense of tradition and identity formation. Finally, local experience and changes in culture and society have been too long ignored in theological education and need to be made part of the foundations of future teaching.

THE YEAR 2000: OUR WORLD AT THE MILLENNIUM

WE ARE APPROACHING A MAJOR MILESTONE in the Western Christian calendar, the year 2000, or the turning of the second millennium since the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ. This rare moment has given rise to a tidal wave of anxieties and celebrations, reflections on past and future, a major "taking stock" of where we have been and where we are going. While some of the millennial preoccupation is simply a product of human psychology, we do seem to have a great deal to ponder. Our late twentieth-century lives have been buffeted by striking changes in "the world" we thought we knew, changes which our imaginations, consciences, and spiritual vision are struggling to address. To borrow Alvin Toffler's memorable phrase, we feel that we are living in "future shock", a world in which the pace of change exceeds our ability to absorb and adjust to it.¹

As Toffler's phrase suggests, we tend to view changes from the limited perspective of our own lifetimes – how is the world different from the one in which I grew up, or which my grandparents described to me? The turning of the millennium invites us to a longer

1. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970).

perspective. Taking a "millennial" view of the past thousand years, we see that many of the "changes" which shape our world are rooted in events going back at least to the sixteenth century. That was an age of travel and discovery, particularly for Europeans, but also for a number of cultures in Asia. With travel came trade, and through trade, the exchange of goods and knowledge between and among many cultures of the world. The Europeans also set out in this period on a course of colonisation and conquest, which transformed all of the world's cultures in complex and often vicious ways. Travel and trade also stimulated global migration, which continues to increase.

In the past fifty years, the second half of the last century of the millennium, new currents have countered and cross-cut the flow of European domination and influence. Colonised peoples in many parts of the world dramatically asserted their independence, and others have raised powerful voices demanding justice and redress. The (European) dream of "the white man's burden" and the power of "civilisation" (meaning European culture) have been challenged. The U.S. myth of the "melting pot", in which all would be assimilated into American (read WASP male-defined) culture, has been powerfully undermined by the articulation of voices from women, persons of colour, persons of diverse cultural backgrounds, native (first nation) peoples, and so on. The voices of diversity, locality, and particularity are resisting assimilation into the (white, middle class, male-defined) "mainstream".

In addition, the late twentieth century developments in communications technology, economic relations, and mobility have successfully permeated what were once relatively clear borders and cultural boundaries. When I was a child in school, we could map the cultures and religions of the world in neatly colour-coded regions or blocs; since then the movement of peoples has jumbled this neat picture like the turn of a kaleidoscope, creating a tapestry as complex as an intricately patterned oriental carpet. Cultures and peoples are dispersed globally, no longer confined to their historical or traditional borders. All localities are increasingly global and diverse. Conversely, global commercial and technological culture has permeated everywhere, creating a vast network and marketplace which threatens to homogenise/colonise the world (including Europe and North America) under the sign of McDonald's and Coca Cola rather than any national power.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AT THE MILLENNIUM: THE CASE OF THE UNITED STATES

While theological educators need to be cognisant of and address all of the forces of globalisation and pluralism in the world, the case of

religious pluralism (or, religio-cultural pluralism) is very close to the heart of our project. Theological education (certainly in North America, but arguably throughout the world) is still framed by models which presume a religious world far different from that in which we live today. I will be deliberately provocative by claiming that theological education has not fundamentally taken account of the sea changes of the post-colonial, global world since the end of World War II. We are teaching theology as a remnant of a time that is gone, a nostalgic ideal of “the Christian life”.

Let me begin by describing the situation in North America (particularly the United States). I do not invoke the North American situation as paradigmatic of the emerging religious pluralism in all cultures, but as one example (familiar to me) of the particularity and complexity of the emergence of pluralism. There is no “global” perspective on pluralism, simply a concatenation of myriad particular stories, each of which raises the promise and challenge of religious pluralism in its own context.

In the United States, it was not long ago that we were confident that we were a “Christian” culture. This myth² of the “Christian” American culture erased the religions of the native Americans, defied history (most of the Founding Fathers were deists who wanted little or nothing to do with traditional Christianity), and resolutely ignored the presence and influence of the Jews among the European immigrants. None the less, this myth shaped the “civil religion” of American culture, and was frequently invoked by political, cultural, and religious leaders.³ It is still held to by many in the American heartland (the so-called “Bible belt”) and among many evangelical Christians in the U.S.

Several significant movements among Native Americans (First Nation Peoples) in the Americas have begun to reassert the values and beliefs of traditional religions of the Americas, challenging the Christian hegemony in both popular perception and the courts.⁴ Moreover, shifts in the patterns of migration have brought significant influxes of religions from around the globe into the American religious tapestry. Thus there are now more Muslims than Episcopalians in the United States, with fifty or so mosques in Chicago alone.⁵ In addition,

2. I use the term “myth” in its technical “religious studies” sense as a tale which articulates the sense of identity of a community.

3. Sociologist Robert Bellah coined this useful term for the rhetoric, symbols, and values invoked by public officials and in public documents to unite the polis.

4. In a number of significant cases Native Americans have gone to court to defend their rights to their traditional religious practices under the rubric of “religious freedom”. Such cases are discussed in Christopher Vecsey, *Handbook of American Indian Religious Freedom* (New York: Crossroads Books, 1991) esp. 7-25.

5. As a further challenge to the traditional self-understanding of Episcopalians (and Anglicans) as centred in British and English speaking culture, the demographic centre of

even medium-sized U.S. cities now include Buddhists, Hindus, Afro-Brazilian or Caribbean religions, New Age practices, and so on. There is a practising Hindu teaching Religious Studies (and raising his family as Hindus) at St Olaf, a small Lutheran college in Northfield, Minnesota. When I went to college in Minnesota thirty years ago, St Olaf was a symbol of Norwegian Lutheran homogeneity – no longer!

Not only do diverse religious traditions and communities live in close proximity in many communities across North America, but Christianity itself has become more culturally diverse in America. Whereas once the United States sent missionaries to nurture Christians around the world, now the world's Christians live and worship among us. In the Episcopalian diocese of California, the San Francisco region, services are held in 52 different languages. Often, although not always, one church building is home for two (or sometimes three) linguistic/ cultural groups.

Moreover, as Robert Wuthnow has documented,⁶ the landscape of American religion has witnessed the decline of the traditional denominations in two significant respects. First, the regional differences among Christians in contemporary U.S. culture are more definitive than denominational differences. That is to say, Episcopalians in Georgia are likely to have more in common (in terms of beliefs, values, and religious sensibilities) with Southern Baptists than with Episcopalians in California. Second, Wuthnow and others have noted that U.S. Christians manifest a significant decline in denominational loyalty. It is increasingly common for persons and families to cross denominations readily in their choice of a church. Their reasons for choosing a particular church/parish have more to do with program and ethos (how is the church school? what is the kind and level of music? is there a young adults' program?) than with its denomination.

These two factors may help to explain the rise of non-denominational churches, both the so-called "community" churches (serving small communities of mixed denominational background) and the enormously successful mega-churches which deliberately seek to transcend denominational constraints and identifications.⁷ This decline of the importance of denominations is a major change in a culture in which, according to Will Herberg's classic study in the

the Anglican church is rapidly shifting to Africa. This move requires a dramatic re-centring of the religious imaginations of North Americans (and perhaps Europeans) who persist in seeing their churches as centred on their turf.

6. Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion: Society and Faith Since World War II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

7. Such churches also manifest no interest in seminary education. They prefer to train their pastors in-house and on the job.

1950s, one's denominational affiliation was the single best indicator of voting patterns in local and national elections.⁸

SEMINARIES AND DENOMINATIONAL IDENTITY

The religious and cultural changes in U.S. society are at dramatic odds with the dominant practices and assumptions of our theological seminaries. The vast majority of seminaries are still denominational seminaries, for whom a primary mission is the "traditioning" of students in the history of the doctrinal, liturgical, political and Biblical heritage of the denomination, as traced to its beginnings in Europe or North America. Added to this central concern with "traditioning", which is reinforced by denominational patterns of support, seminaries also seek to give some attention to contemporary issues: racial justice, feminism/women's history, environmental concerns, liberationist movements, and so forth.

It has been, and still is, a primary function of seminaries to articulate and maintain denominational identity. For Protestants, the seminary is the locus in which denominational identity is sustained. General conventions or assemblies of the denomination may debate and decide key issues, but in the space before and after these huge meetings, the issues are debated, articulated, and taught in the seminaries, which produce the clergy and lay leadership of the denomination. Both Protestants and Catholics lament the level of religious illiteracy among their adherents; even seminarians often begin their training with less than a rudimentary knowledge of the basics of the faith. This decline in "religious socialisation" puts even more pressure on seminaries to do the job of "traditioning".⁹

Given the decline of denominations discussed by Wuthnow and others, it may be that denominational seminaries are increasingly "dinosaurs", the remnants of a species which is already functionally extinct.¹⁰ Theological educators don't want to hear such warnings. We

8. Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1955).

9. Discussions of the deans in the ecumenical consortium of the GTU underscored how the religious illiteracy of seminarians strained the assumptions in theological education about where to begin. Today's curricula and courses assume extensive familiarity with the rudiments, calendar, and worship life of the church, the sort gained through years of participation in the denomination. Such an assumption is not always warranted today, but seminary professors have not developed an approach to basic or remedial education.

10. John Wilson of Yale made this argument at an Auburn Seminary conference on the future of doctoral education in theology in 1993 or 1994. His remark was deliberately provocative, but his intention was to push the logic of the decline of denominationalism to its inevitable conclusion. Is it possible that we will have to rethink fundamentally the *raison d'être* of the seminary? As Wilson pointed out, institutions (particularly educational institutions) have a disquieting habit of far outliving their functional

still see our institutions and education as serving the churches, and we still understand those churches denominationally in terms of the training of pastors.¹¹

Denominations are unlikely to die out quickly on U.S. soil, but the denominations are no longer internally homogeneous. They are now large umbrellas for a host of regional and cultural differences. The rise of many voices – of a host of particularities beginning with region, culture, and gender – suggests a multiplication of Christianities rather than its homogenisation. The boundaries between denominations are likely to continue to be fluid and permeable, but denominations will also become more internally differentiated.

The diverse voices/communities within denominations are shaped by regional and cultural forces rather than by the issues which shaped the “founding battles” between the denominations in Europe. One reason the Chinese opted for a post-denominational church was that the issues dividing Methodists, Baptists, and Episcopalians made little sense to them; what they saw were the Christian issues which united these groups. Seen against a background of Buddhism, Daoism, and Chinese local religions, the Christian denominations seemed to the Chinese more alike than different. Likewise, the issues giving rise to new voices in Christianity, representing different cultural, regional, or gendered perspectives, are shaped by contextual issues quite distinct from those of sixteenth or seventeenth-century Europe. Given the concerns of these Christians, denominational options come to have a new meaning and significance. Shifts in the basic meaning and significance of “the denomination” will require a significant rethinking of theological education. We cannot expect to be successful if we are educating students for a lost nostalgic past. Both the gospel message and the ministry to the faithful have to address the world of today and of tomorrow; we must look beyond 2000.

RETHINKING THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR THE NEW MILLENNIUM

a. Traditioning

The concern for traditioning is a real and a serious matter. Whether it is new converts, Christians who “drop out” of church for

usefulness. Thus it is likely to be a long and gradual transition to a new model of the seminary.

11. It may be that the experience of the post-denominational church in China will serve as some kind of model or paradigm for us in North America. The China Christian Council is now struggling with issues of polity – how to adjudicate differences of worship and belief among Christians when the senior generation of denominationally trained and ordained pastors has passed on. Despite their concern for the future, the success of this post-denominational church is an important lesson for U.S. Christians, whose history has been full of denominational tensions.

much of their young adulthood, or persons who identify their appropriate community of faith late in life, a huge number of Christians (and even seminarians) lack a rudimentary sense of their tradition. Christians need to know something of the Biblical heritage, the traditions of worship, the structure of the church year, the meaning of the sacraments, the roles and purposes of ministry, and the range of religious art and music. Without some sense of tradition, Christianity becomes fragmented and commodified: bits and pieces available at a religious “rummage sale” with no sense of how the various bits and pieces fit together as a coherent religious path.

However, while tradition is important, it is also true that Christians (and particularly theological educators) have had a very narrow and rigid view of tradition, a sort of backwards tunnel vision pointing toward our European origins. Our educational practices have selectively normalised *some* moments in the history of Christianity so as to perpetuate the sensibilities and ethos of some mythical “normative” time. Across the globe, many new believers and theological educators have held to the styles and ethos of Euro-American missionaries, forgetting that the cultural styles of the Christianity of the missionaries were as localised and contextualised as anyone’s. We have selectively privileged European (and to some degree North American) localised forms of Christianity as normative for the global church. It is all too easy to lift up a particular embodiment of Christian life as “tradition”, and it is sadly true that the forms we happen to lift up are shaped by issues of power.

b. Christian Identity Formation

Because over many centuries we have tended to think of “tradition” as a body of beliefs, texts, and practices which can be handed down, we easily fall into what Freire called “the banking model” of theological education.¹² We set up a curriculum which “covers” the appropriate material, and ask that students receive it.

I would argue that it is important that we shift from thinking of tradition as a noun (a body of information) to thinking of it as a verb (a process in which a believer engages to develop and articulate a Christian identity). If “traditioning” is seen as a process of identity formation, the task will be to engage the student in it.

Moreover, when the focus of our attention is on the Christian (the student) rather than on the content of the tradition, we inevitably ask the question, how are Christians, or how is this Christian, actually formed? What are the contexts (cultural, religious, social, personal) which shape and flavour their Christian faith and life?

12. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

My proposal for refocussing theological education around the process of Christian identity formation may be shaped by the fact that I am an Episcopalian. While I do not have exact figures, a large proportion of Episcopalians either (a) were baptized in another Christian denomination and found their way to the Episcopal church later in life, (b) had extensive experience in another denomination or faith such as Buddhism or Hinduism, (c) are involved in an interfaith family through marriage or the practices of their grown children, or (d) have had extensive life experience in another culture because of migration, study or work abroad, or intermarriage. The religious lives of persons in my parish and my denomination are complex and diverse. The traditional notion of the Episcopal church as rooted in and shaped by its English ethos is an inadequate paradigm for what one actually encounters in the Episcopal church today.

If Episcopalians are a striking example of the religious diversity and complexity of the lives of contemporary Christians, my experience in the ecumenical consortium of the Graduate Theological Union has reinforced my impression that many, many Christians have religiously complex histories and lives. Given that reality, we would benefit from a profound rethinking of the patterns of Christian identity formation.

In today's world, the identity formation of Christians is not simply a matter of "traditioning" them, of socialising them into the denominations. It is also a matter of their personal and family histories, their religious and cultural journeys. What experiences, backgrounds, and sensibilities do persons bring to their faith? How is the faith particularised, enriched, and complicated by the particular cultural and religious history of each person and community?

Some attention to the complex and multi-layered process of identity formation has to be a foundation, a starting point for theological education. Such a starting point would also fundamentally alter how we approach the traditional divisions of the theological curriculum.

c. Church History

Attention to the processes of Christian identity formation would help us to escape the strictures of traditional church history, which privileges a lineage looking narrowly back toward the founding European fathers. A church history sensitive to the processes of Christian identity formation would first and foremost acknowledge the multiple strands and perspectives, the various influences, forces, and voices, which have shaped the global church. It would include the voices of women, of lay and ordinary believers, and of the "church global" – not seeing the "centre" of the church in a narrow cultural or

regional milieu. It would focus on popular practices, attitudes, and art as well as on the history of doctrines or of official “pronouncements” of the church. It would study dynamics of the “reception” of the gospel in diverse cultural contexts and would acknowledge the complex and not always blameless history of the spread of the church.

Attention to the processes of Christian identity formation would also mandate a localised, contextualised approach to church history – an approach which turns the traditional way of teaching history (tracing from the identified “origin” to the present) on its head. This approach is well exemplified in a course developed for the native ministries program offered by several denominations through Vancouver School of Theology.¹³ Their program’s course in church history starts in the native village, with the family and clan of the village and their traditions; it moves out from there to the alliances the village has with other native communities and traditions; to its place in the region and nation of Canada; to the coming and role of Christianity in this locale; and from there to a study of the church as it functions in Canada and the globe, and thence back to the origins of the church.

This radically localised model of church history leaves behind the “banking model” of handing down information about the European past in order to empower Christians to construct their history starting from their local contexts. It teaches pastors and leaders how to recover their own histories and to assist other people to recover theirs. It recognises that there is not a single historical narrative of the Christian church, but that there are many stories shaped by the particular experiences of particular communities, who then come together to form the global church.

In this view of church history, we not only learn of “the” past, but we as Christians learn from and with one another, sharing our particular angles on how the past has shaped our Christianities.

d. Theology

Attention to the processes of Christian identity formation in today’s global and diverse world would also challenge the way that we teach theology. The traditional approach to systematic theology assumes that all Christians are formed in conversations with professional church theologians around a set of doctrinal issues closely connected to the official creeds of the church. Such theology has been an important part of the Christian heritage, but once again it

13. See Brian J. Fraser, “Exploring New Approaches in the Native Ministries Degree Programme at Vancouver School of Theology”, in *Globalization and the Classical Theological Disciplines*, Special Issue of *Theological Education* (Spring, 1993) 73-90.

privileges voices and issues that trace a relatively narrow path back to the European origins of our denominations.

Contemporary Christian identity formation, by contrast, has multiple sources, including – but not limited to – traditional systematic theology. It insists that theologising (the theological reflections of persons of faith throughout the global church) is contextual, and that Europe is not the only context of the global church. It conceives of theology from the ground up, starting with the local contexts and with the lived experience of persons of faith. Such local and experientially based (embodied) theologies foreground different issues than do the categories of systematic theology; they focus on the lived issues of faith: how does the gospel transform, liberate, and give meaning to the lives of faithful Christians in many contexts and life situations? Do differences of gender, culture, and location affect the way that the gospel is interpreted, understood, received, and lived?

In North American seminaries, we have begun to recognise the contributions of feminists, liberationists, racial-ethnic, and contextual theologians, but too often we have acknowledged these important forces by simply adding a book or two to a traditional course, or – worse yet – offering such items as electives after the student has mastered the “core” of systematic theology.¹⁴

There is a need to bring the localised, experiential mode of theologising into dialogue with traditional systematic theology as a way of introducing students to the contemporary dynamic and art of theologising. Put another way, theology needs to be taught not simply as a professional discipline and specialisation. The goal is not to train a cadre of professionals who can theologise in conversation with each other and the past. Theology/theologising is the task of all Christians. Pastors, teachers, and scholars need to help all faith people discover and articulate their theological voices from the standpoints of their contexts and life experiences.

e. Bible

The Bible is a central and defining resource for Christian community and Christian identity. We are very much people of the book. But too often the Bible is taught as hostage to a highly particular and arcane form of European scholarship. The traditions of

14. In the GTU doctoral program, for instance, it is still true that the general comprehensives in systematic theology focus on nineteenth and early twentieth century systematic theology. Feminist theologies, liberationist theologies, black theologies, or contextual theologies can only be dealt with in the elective “specialised examination” at the end of the comprehensives. This program has its merits, but it does not recognise the extent to which traditional systematic theology has been challenged by the emergence of new theological voices; it treats the newer voices as afterthought.

Biblical scholarship have given us valuable tools for re-interpreting and testing the “narratives” of our tradition, but the Bible also needs to be read and interpreted contextually.

One aspect of such readings is recognition of how located and contextual our traditional readings of the Bible have been. Feminist Biblical scholars have done a major service by showing the biases in the editing of Biblical sources and in historical interpretations of Biblical texts. Their work has provided a foundation for offering many different readings of, and many angles of vision on, Biblical interpretation.

Such angles of vision emphatically include readings and interpretations of the Bible which reflect the diverse cultural settings in which Christians live.¹⁵ The Bible speaks and functions in those cultural settings against the background of cultural sensibilities, values, and indigenous traditions, oral and written. Its role can be determined by the role of texts (writing and sacred texts) in the culture, as well as by the role of the word (oral word, voice of God).¹⁶

Pastors, teachers, and scholars must be trained to empower all Christians to read and interpret the Bible from their particular contexts as a basis of Christian life.

f. Liturgy and Worship

Theological education has as one of its key roles the training of leaders of worship and the development of appropriate modes of worship for the various Christian communities.

On the one hand, this means socialising both leaders and laity into the traditions of worship within a particular community, so that members of that church can enter a service anywhere in the world and feel some sense of familiarity and recognition, a sense that “yes, this is where I belong and worship”.

On the other hand, it also means contextualising worship to the many cultural settings and sensibilities around the world. This is, in my experience, a complex issue. Take the case of the church in China. The Chinese love music, and I have been told repeatedly by Chinese friends that, for the Chinese, church music is a major draw to Christianity. But this generalisation has many embodiments in different contexts within China. In regions of Chinese “minority peoples”, the Christian church is growing at an astounding pace

15. See, for example, Fernando F. Segovia and Mary A. Tolbert (eds.), *Reading from this Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995).

16. These issues are discussed with insight in Miriam Levering (ed.), *Rethinking Scripture: Essays from a Comparative Perspective* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989).

because it welcomes the music and dancing traditions of the people as part of Christian worship. Thus the affirmation of pre-existing local traditions becomes a major evangelical strategy. Christians throughout China have also developed distinctive "spiritual songs" and "Bible songs", built on traditional Chinese musical traditions.¹⁷ Finally, I was told that in urban China, many Christians – even so-called "cultural Christians" who are not ready to join the church – are deeply moved by and devoted to Western style church music (Beethoven, Handel, and so on). In this latter case, Chinese are drawn to Christianity through the avenue of their response to Western-style Christian music. It is a challenge for Chinese Christians to negotiate these quite different sensibilities and tastes in matters of worship within China.

The issue of culturally appropriate worship is also challenging in highly mixed cultural contexts, such as Vancouver, Toronto, and San Francisco. Faculty at Vancouver School of Theology, Toronto School of Theology, and Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley¹⁸ report that on-campus worship has become a highly contentious issue. On the one hand, constituencies feel excluded or marginalised if their particular worship styles are ignored, and yet everyone feels excluded in any attempt at a bland homogenisation of styles (a sort of liturgical Esperanto).

The experience of these places suggests that theological schools need to offer many particular forms of worship, letting each constituency in turn design and offer worship to which they invite the other students and faculty as guests. This cycle of hospitality (letting each group have a turn as hosts, and asking all to learn to be guests) may be the most promising route for developing "cosmopolitan" citizens prepared to meet other Christians in the church universal.¹⁹ Exposure to other styles of worship can help to develop cross-cultural sensibilities and sophistication, an appreciation of the diversity, in some ways comparable to our growing appreciation of the foods, music, dance, arts, textiles, and jewellery of other cultures.

Pastors, teachers and scholars need to learn to provide a range of particular worship styles for their parishes, as needed, and to connect

17. See Antoinette Wire, "Songs of China's Rural Churches", in Judith A. Berling (ed.), *With Faith We Can Move Mountains: Reflections of the GTU Asia Pacific Bridges Consultation in China, October, 1995* (Berkeley, CA: Graduate Theological Union and Asia Pacific Bridges, 1996) 51-62.

18. Note that these are all multi-denominational schools, so that their students represent both ecumenical and cultural diversities within the larger Christian community.

19. The notion of the round of hospitality is a pattern I discovered in my study of traditional religious life in China. I explore the Chinese strategies for negotiating religious diversity in my recent book *A Pilgrim in Chinese Culture: Negotiating Religious Diversity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997). The round of hospitality is featured in chapter 8.

their parishioners with the styles and ethos of worship among their fellow Christians.

g. Ethics and Justice: The Christian Life

For many faithful Christians, their primary questions have to do with ethics: what difference does my Christianity make? how am I to live a Christian life?

If it started from these questions of Christian identity, theological education on ethics and the Christian life would not limit itself to the particular values and traditions of moral discernment which have characterised a denomination (although these are clearly important), but would also address issues on the "battle lines", issues of justice currently contended in the church and in the social context. In other words, Christian ethics should address the real and vital issues of contemporary life. Christian ethics should also offer a sense of global issues and how those global issues impact on the local setting.

Given the realities of the global world, where commercial and material interests are extremely powerful and the "universal" moral language is that of "self interest", it is vital that Christians learn how to ally themselves with members of other religious communities against the overwhelming and depersonalising forces of materialism and commercialism. Religion is an important brake on, or qualifier of, the reign of self-interest and the profit motive. What are the responsibilities of religious persons in the global world?

CONCLUSION

This article has begun the process of envisioning the impact on theological education of taking as a starting point the complex process of Christian identity formation in a global, ecumenical, plural world – the world beyond 2000. I have pushed myself to be as concrete as possible in order to stimulate the imaginations of my readers. The particular suggestions I have made will neither fit all schools nor all circumstances. They are meant to elicit conversation rather than to prescribe a formula for theological education on the other side of the millennium.

The suggestions in this article also lift up a number of issues or general principles which I believe need to be addressed.

- Theological students beyond the year 2000 need exposure to diverse voices and strands within Christianity and within their denomination and its neighbours. Because of the changing context of world and of church, this exposure should include both local and global elements.

- Theological education should be grounded in a sense of the complexity of religious identities in today's world, both throughout the church universal and in our local parishes.
- Theology students require knowledge of the "shaping forces" of Christian identity formation: cultural contexts, indigenous traditions, religious neighbours. This means that we will need to build into theological education appropriate exposure to other religious traditions which represent the contexts and neighbours of local Christianities. Doing this well requires finding ways around the rigid habit of Christian exclusivism; we need a more thoughtful and realistic sense of our relationship with, and hospitality towards, our religious neighbours.
- Theological education beyond the millennium must offer theological students not only a sense of their tradition (the banking model of education), but must also empower them to empower all Christians with an ability to construct and understand their religious histories; to theologise in and from their contexts; to read and interpret the Bible as a guide to their lives and their faith; to address value issues as Christians and to work with other religious people for God's healing and justice in the world.

The myriad and rapid changes in our global world pose a challenge to theological education and also offer a remarkable opportunity. The church and the world are not what they were prior to World War II, and so it should not be surprising that a paradigm of theological education rooted in the early twentieth century should be increasingly out of joint with contemporary needs of ministry and theological reflection. The challenge to past habits offers, however, a remarkable opportunity for the future: an invitation to rethink the task and strategies of theological education in light of a global world and an ecumenical and global church. The turning of the year 2000 is a milestone which asks us to revisit the traditions of theological education, and to renew and revitalise our work as we embark upon the next millennium.