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SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN THE CONTEXT OF
SEMINARY-LEVEL DISTANCE COMPETENCY-
BASED THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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APPROVAL SHEET

SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN THE CONTEXT OF
SEMINARY-LEVEL DISTANCE COMPETENCY-
BASED THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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To my wife and best friend, without your constant support, most projects in my life, including this academic product, would not exist. Your unceasing care for me and for our kids reflects your deep love for Jesus and for us.

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PREFACE

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Seminary, like many forms of post-secondary education, has changed dramatically in the last few decades. The seminary endeavor has transitioned from a primarily residential full-time undertaking to a project assumed by individuals in a multiplicity of life-stages and in less traditional and less-residency-oriented formats.¹ The most notable change has come in the form of the online campus and the use of digital technology. For example, in 1997, no seminary in the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) offered any courses in an online format.² By 2007, only one-fourth of ATS schools offered any kind of course online. By 2017, two-thirds of the 273 member schools offered online courses, with one-fourth of ATS schools offering theological degrees completely online. These online programs reduce the face-to-face time of the traditional physical-campus-oriented student experience. Alternately, in recent years, several schools have pioneered competency-based theological education (CBTE) in the context of distance and hybrid seminary programs.³ Competency-based programs may offer an alternate and perhaps complementary distance pedagogical method to the digitized classroom that has become ubiquitous with distance seminary education. One of the most

¹ John Cartwright et al., *Teaching the World: Foundations for Online Theological Education* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2018), 10.

² Association of Theological Schools, "Online Learning at ATS Schools: Part 1," accessed January 31, 2019, <https://www.ats.edu/uploads/resources/publications-presentations/colloquy-online/online-learning-part-1.pdf>.

³ Competency-Based Theological Education International Conference, "A Brief History of CBTE," accessed March 7, 2019, <https://cbte.ca/a-brief-history/>.

significant concerns regarding distance seminary education in any form is spiritual formation as experienced in the life of the student.

Competency-Based Education

Interest in competency-based education (CBE) has bloomed in recent years.⁴ CBE, as defined by the Competency-Based Education Network, is an educational model that “combines an intentional and transparent approach to curricular design with an academic model in which the time it takes to demonstrate competencies varies and the expectations about learning are held constant.”⁵ In a CBE modality, students are mentored by appropriate and qualified faculty to academically arrive at a place where they can demonstrate competency through various assignments and activities geared to particular students and their context so that they can complete a degree or credential.⁶ In CBE, educational objectives remain constant, while the methods by which students demonstrate mastery of the subject varies.⁷ In 2013, the Department of Education made way for development of CBE programs.⁸ In that same year, President Barack Obama advocated for the implementation of CBE models in post-secondary educational institutions in his State of the Union presidential address.⁹ Educators in the world of K-12 and post-secondary education are investigating and innovating within this pedagogical

⁴ Mike Ruyle, *Leading the Evolution: How to Make Personalized Competency-Based Education a Reality* (Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research, 2019), 23-24.

⁵ Deborah J. Bushway, Laurie Dodge, and Charla S. Long, *A Leaders Guide to Competency-Based Education: From Inception to Implementation* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2018), 2.

⁶ Bushway, Dodge, and Long, *Guide to Competency-Based Education*, 2.

⁷ Bushway, Dodge, and Long, *Guide to Competency-Based Education*, 3.

⁸ Information for Financial Aid Professionals, “Applying for Title IV Eligibility for Direct Assessment (Competency-Based) Programs,” accessed March 7, 2019, <https://ifap.ed.gov/dpceletters/GEN1310.html>.

⁹ Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President in the State of the Union Address,” Whitehouse of President Barack Obama, accessed March 7, 2019, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/02/12/remarks-president-state-union-address>.

model.¹⁰ In the context of post-secondary education, CBE is often executed in distance and non-resident formats. This modality is made possible by non-linear non-course-based formats tailored to individual students that incorporate the evaluation of skills and abilities the students develop along with prior learning the students bring into their program.

Modern Distance Theological Education

Distance seminary education has been available since the mid-nineteenth century.¹¹ Observationally, in the last several decades, online education has radically changed both the execution and the popularity of distance and modular instruction. Online education has transitioned from an innovative experiment to a viable mainstay of seminary education (a reality evidenced by the 185 ATS-accredited schools currently approved for online delivery of programs).¹² As the internet has grown into a pervasive modern phenomenon, seminaries have availed themselves of digital technology to give access to an unprecedented number of students. Today, seminaries dispense distance education through increasingly sophisticated digital technology.

Much of what constitutes online education is the result of the digitization of the modern classroom.¹³ To create online classes, most schools port traditional brick-and-mortar content into an asynchronous digital format through the use of video lectures and online discussion forums executed by students throughout a calendared term. Some

¹⁰ Bushway, Dodge, and Long, *Guide to Competency-Based Education*, 17.

¹¹ Cartwright et al., *Teaching the World*, 6.

¹² Association of Theological Schools, "Schools Approved for Online Delivery," accessed January 28, 2021, <https://www.ats.edu/member-schools/member-school-distance-education>.

¹³ John Beck Cartwright Jr., "Best Practices for Online Theological Ministry Preparation: A Delphi Method Study" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 1-2.

educators have embraced the trend,¹⁴ while others have questioned its validity.¹⁵ Some thinkers have raised concerns over the execution of these ported classrooms and digitized degrees when applied to the task of theological education and seminary training. John Cartwright considers the possibility that the “decisions to offer online programs may not always have been rooted in deep pedagogical or theological reflection, [rather], the choice seems to have been driven by pragmatic considerations.”¹⁶ Likewise, Paul House expresses concern regarding the essential embodied nature of pastoral development and spiritual formation that happens in the context of face-to-face seminary education.¹⁷ Given that distance seminary education is part of the modern theological learning environment and that spiritual formation is an integral component of theological training, it is essential that seminaries consider how to promote spiritual formation in the life of non-resident students across the space created by the nature of this modality. Because of the growing popularity of the online execution of distance theological education, concerns regarding spiritual formation seem especially relevant. While some seminaries may question what might be considered non-traditional approaches to seminary, it seems valuable to remember that seminary as it has been executed in the West is a relatively new advent, in and of itself and well executed innovation may provide a way for theological education to flourish in the future.¹⁸

¹⁴ Stephen D. Lowe and Mary E. Lowe, *Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age: Spiritual Growth through Online Education* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018); Joanne J. Jung, *Character Formation in Online Education: A Guide for Instructors, Administrators, and Accrediting Agencies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).

¹⁵ Paul R. House, *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision: A Case for Costly Discipleship and Life Together* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

¹⁶ Cartwright, “Online Theological Ministry Preparation,” 1.

¹⁷ House, *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision*, 15.

¹⁸ Justo L. González, *The History of Theological Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015),

Competency-Based Theological Education

In October of 2018, ATS hosted their first conference on CBTE in Vancouver, British Columbia.¹⁹ Representatives from various educational institutions throughout North America and the world attended the conference.²⁰ The focus of the conference was to consider the implementation of competency-based practices and how ATS schools might adopt a CBTE modality in some shape or form. At the time of the conference, there were only three ATS schools offering CBTE programs: Northwest Baptist Seminary (Vancouver, BC), Grace Seminary (Winona Lake, IN), and Sioux Falls Seminary (Sioux Falls, SD).²¹ These programs utilize aspects of the content delivery found in traditional and contemporary distance programs, namely, that students are, at times, learning content through reading or audio/visual technologies and learning-management systems.²² However, each of the ATS-accredited CBTE seminary programs anchor the students' learning experiences in the interaction with a mentor team. These teams work alongside students to help them develop theologically, spiritually, and professionally. Students' programs are tailored to their context and ministry and executed, at least in part, in the setting of students' local church and utilize creative innovations in seminary administration to facilitate these programs.

Spiritual Formation and Theological Education

Seminary theological education, distance or otherwise, arguably exists, at least in part, to develop people spiritually for ministry. Evan B. Howard defines Christian

¹⁹ Competency-Based Theological Education International Conference, "A Brief History of CBTE."

²⁰ Northwest Baptist Seminary, "CBTE 2018 a Success," accessed March 7, 2019, <https://www.nbseminary.ca/cbte-2018-a-success>.

²¹ Northwest Baptist Seminary, "CBTE 2018 a Success."

²² Sioux Falls Seminary, "Kairos Project," accessed March 7, 2019, <https://sfseminary.edu/prospective-students/programs/distance-learning/>; Grace Theological Seminary, "Deploy Program Competencies," accessed March 7, 2019, <https://www.grace.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Core-Competencies.pdf>; Northwest Baptist Seminary, "Immerse: Context Based Ministry Development," accessed March 7, 2019, <https://www.nbseminary.ca/programs/immerse>.

spiritual formation as “a Spirit- and human-led process by which individuals and communities mature in relationship with the Christian God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and are changed into ever-greater likeness to the life and gospel of this God.”²³ Not only does the very nature of seminary education require a spiritual formation component, but it is also an accreditation requirement of ATS. While ATS is unequivocal about the accreditation requirement regarding spiritual formation, the specifics of its execution are left open, allowing particular schools to contextualize spiritual formation elements to their own institution and faith tradition. Nonetheless, spiritual formation of some kind is a requirement of ATS schools. According to ATS’s accreditation standards, “theological schools are communities of faith and learning centered on student learning and formation [and] give appropriate attention to the intellectual, human, spiritual and vocational dimensions of student formation and learning.”²⁴ ATS accreditation requires the development of “intellectual, human, spiritual, and vocational learning” at every one of its accredited seminaries, consistent with each school’s religious identity.

Currently, there are some educators calling into question the efficacy of the online seminary to develop students for life and ministry.²⁵ CBTE’s focus on contextualized theological education and mentor teams offer a possible alternative to the typical digitized online seminary experience. Likewise, CBTE practitioners may contribute some insights into how seminaries can maintain the accessibility afforded through online coursework while encouraging a spiritual formation priority in the lives of non-resident students across space created by the nature of distance education.

²³ Evan B. Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation: How Scripture, Spirit, Community and Mission Shape Our Souls* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 18.

²⁴ Association of Theological Schools, *Standards of Accreditation* (Pittsburgh: ATS, 2020), 3.

²⁵ Kristen Ann Ferguson, “Evangelical Faculty Perceptions of Online Learning in Graduate-Level Theological Education” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 4-5.

Presentation of the Research Problem

The intended aim of this project was to identify best practices in spiritual formation in the context of distance post-secondary seminary competency-based theological education. The online seminary has become a standard modality for many institutions. As digital technology has grown in sophistication and availability, so has its use in distance education. While programs have become more polished, most are still fundamentally highly individualized ported versions of brick-and-mortar courses that students execute, to some degree, in isolation, created by space and the nature of asynchronous course design. Observationally, when people think of distance seminary education, they think of students watching video lectures and turning in assignments online, with little to no interaction with the person delivering lectures and designing those courses. This online model has become common in the world of distance theological education. At the same time, a serious concern has developed regarding the depth of spiritual formation experienced by online seminarians. Seminary professors have grown less confident in the online model for preparing ministers for theological education.²⁶ Likewise, advocates of an incarnational seminary model have questioned the effectiveness of seminary executed in a mode disembodied from an on-the-ground learning community.²⁷

In recent years, several ATS schools endeavored to experiment with non-linear non-residency mentor overseen CBTE programs. These programs utilize many of the same kinds of tools that drive the typical online program. Like typically digitized campuses, these CBTE programs leverage technological advances to further the education of the students, especially in the realm of content delivery systems. At the same time, these programs share similar and innovative pedagogical approaches. For example,

²⁶ Ferguson, "Perceptions of Online Learning," 4-5.

²⁷ House, *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision*.

mentor teams are deeply involved in the holistic development of students for the duration of their program. Mentors from students' ministry or geographical context along with seminary faculty mentors create a more relational and embodied learning environment than a typical electronic classroom. Likewise, these CBTE programs utilize non-linear course of study.

While CBE gains momentum in the world of post-secondary education outside of the seminary, both its study and application are underdeveloped in the context of graduate-level theological education. CBTE programs may offer some insight into the greater world of online learning. Collaboration among seminary-level CBTE practitioners could provide a helpful model for how schools seeking to provide access for ministry training through online education might be able to leverage digital technology and a mentor-based CBTE model (or some elements therein) to train pastors and ministers in light of the seminary's priority of spiritual formation.

The purpose of this mixed methods exploratory sequential design is to explore the best practices of post-secondary seminary educators in the context of competency-based distance education (both hybrid and fully distance programs), specifically in the task of spiritual formation in the lives of students. This research examines the perception of seminary educators regarding interactions with competency-based students through distance and what those educators have done to promote discipleship, character formation, and spiritual growth. This research describes how seminary educators experience the task of spiritual formation in the life of their students through relationships mediated by digital technology and the space created by the nature of distance education in a competency-based seminary model. This research will build on John Cartwright's research regarding online theological ministry preparation,²⁸ Kristin Ferguson's research

²⁸ Cartwright, "Online Theological Ministry Preparation."

regarding faculty perceptions of online theological education,²⁹ and Neal Ledbetter's research regarding best practices in online undergraduate spiritual formation in the context of Christian four-year institutions.³⁰

This study is designed to further explore those research concerns related to seminary education through an examination of perceptions about human interaction in actual seminary distance education coursework. This study involves a modification of Cartwright's Delphi instrumentation and focuses on the three ATS-accredited seminaries with established non-residency competency-based programs.³¹ These schools were selected because they were the subject of a peer-group report created by ATS for the study of CBTE and are the three schools with the longest-standing ATS-approved CBTE programs as well as the only programs that have presently graduated students.³² This study details pedagogical and philosophical foundations, such as non-linear curricula, context-based learning, and the centrality of mentor teams, and innovations in seminary administration which are shared by all three schools.

Current Status of the Research Problem

A significant research gap exists in the arena of CBTE. A survey of the research demonstrates that there is a need for a study to be completed regarding distance CBTE in the post-secondary seminary context. There have been significant studies in the area of online education, spiritual formation, and theological training specifically. Likewise, there have been significant studies that have focused on online distance

²⁹ Ferguson, "Perceptions of Online Learning."

³⁰ Neal Brian Ledbetter, "Best Practices of Online Undergraduate Spiritual Formation at Select Institutions of Christian Higher Education: A Delphi Study" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 2017).

³¹ Sioux Falls Seminary in Sioux Falls, SD; Northwest Baptist Seminary in Vancouver, BC; and Grace College and Seminary in Winona Lake, IN.

³² Association of Theological Schools, "Competency-Based Education Final Peer Group Report," in *Educational Models and Practices in Theological Education Peer Groups Final Reports* (Pittsburgh: ATS, 2018), 151-59.

education and spiritual formation. There are a growing number of studies, articles, and books focusing on CBE, but little work has been done in the field of CBTE, particularly in the context of accredited post-secondary education.

Likewise, CBE and CBTE (at least in their modern pedagogical conceptualization) are relatively new in the realm of educational theory and practice. Thus, there have been some works regarding CBE and its application to a number of fields, with experts' publishing articles, books, and monographs on the subject. However, there is a lack of published academic research regarding CBTE, and there are no significant studies, scholarly articles, or monographs focusing on the relationship between CBTE and spiritual formation at the seminary level. In part, because of the newness of the CBTE modality, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding CBTE generally and its execution as it pertains to spiritual formation specifically. This study built on previous works considering spiritual formation in the context of post-secondary distance education by explaining the experience of teachers and administrators serving seminary-level students in the context of competency-based theological education.

Methodology

This research focused post-secondary educators, teachers, and administrators in the only three ATS-accredited seminaries with established non-residency competency-based programs. As a mixed methods exploratory sequential study, this research utilized a three-round exploratory sequential Delphi study. The aim of this research was neither to measure the spiritual growth in the life of individual students nor their academic performance. The task of assessing spiritual or character maturation of students is a difficult one and is outside of the scope of this research. Likewise, while CBTE's effectiveness in academic development is important, academic performance may or may not be an indicator of spiritual growth. Instead, this study focuses on the consensus of

best practices from a Delphi study panel of experts on educators' task of fostering and executing spiritual formation in the life of their students in non-residential CBTE programs.

Because this research is focused on spiritual formation in a seminary context, this study was limited to ATS-accredited institutions. Likewise, competency-based education outside of a theological context is beyond the purview of this study. This study focuses on spiritual formation and is limited by its very nature only to seminary education to the exclusion of other Christian post-secondary institutions. As a mixed methods exploratory sequential study, the task of this Delphi study was to discover a consensus among experts regarding both ideal and actual best practices for spiritual formation in competency-based distance education. By the nature of the study, only those who were actively participating in competency-based education were consulted.

Description of the Research Population

This mixed methods study involved a three-round Delphi study. The research intended to explore best practices through the consensus of experts; therefore, this study involved a homogeneous non-random purposive sample population. The intended research population was a group of 9-12 teachers, administrators, and faculty with experience in working directly with students or program design in the three ATS-accredited competency-based seminary programs. Because of the burgeoning nature of competency-based theological education, experience was defined as at least 12-24 months of direct involvement with students or competency-based program design. The population was not random, and probability sampling was not used.

Delimitation of the Samples

For a Delphi study, an expert panel is formed ranging from as few as four to as many as one thousand panelists of either a heterogeneous or homogeneous population.³³ Due to the nature of this Delphi study (e.g., one in which the research attempted to find consensus among experts of a particular theological and institutional framework), the solicited group was homogeneous. Those who were delimited due to the sampling technique included those post-secondary Christian educators who were not teaching in a seminary setting and seminary educators and administrators who did not have at least 12-24 months of experience in working with students or program design in a competency-based theological education program at one of the three schools selected for the study.

Generalization of Research Findings

This study focused on spiritual formation in competency-based theological education executed in distance or hybrid-type contexts. While this research focused on post-secondary seminary education, findings may have relevance for those in other arenas of post-secondary Christian education where spiritual formation is a concern. Likewise, because of the various ways in which distance competency-based students utilize traditional online tools and resources to interact with teachers, courseware, or content, the research findings may also apply to other kinds of distance post-secondary education mediated through an online format (both hybrid and fully online). Additionally, most competency-based theological education is heavily dependent on the local church context of students; therefore, these findings may also aid those undertaking church-based education programs. Finally, this research could potentially benefit institutions of undergraduate theological education seeking to develop CBTE-type programs.

³³ Susanne Iqbal and Laura Pison-Young, "The Delphi Method," *The Psychologist* 22, no. 7 (July 2009): 598.

Proposed Methodological Design

This research entailed a Delphi mixed methods exploratory sequential design. In an exploratory sequential design, “the researcher starts with the collection and analysis of qualitative data that is then followed by a development phase of translating qualitative findings into an approach or tool that is tested quantitatively.”³⁴ Following Cartwright, the first round of this Delphi study was qualitative, with open-ended questions, followed by two quantitative rounds (a Likert-type set of questions and a dichotomous-type set of questions).

The purpose of a Delphi study “is to determine the extent of agreement over a given issue (consensus measurement) and in doing so, to overcome the disadvantages normally found in group or committee decision making.”³⁵ The first round of this study was a modification of a study conducted by Cartwright.³⁶ This modified study was conducted in the context of post-secondary institutions offering competency-based programs. Rather than focusing on online Master of Divinity programs accredited by ATS, due to the narrow specifications of this study, this research focused on ATS seminaries offering competency-based theological education.

Following Cartwright’s Delphi methodology, panelists who met research criteria were invited to participate in the study through an email communication that detailed the purpose of the study along with the time commitment and anonymous nature of the study.³⁷ Those panelists who were initially recruited were sent the Round 1 survey and confirmed that they meet the population characteristics of the research, understood the voluntary nature of their participation, and confirmed their ability to complete the

³⁴ John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2018, 84.

³⁵ Wesley Vernon, “The Delphi Technique: A Review,” *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation* 16, no. 2 (February 2009): 70.

³⁶ Cartwright, “Online Theological Ministry Preparation.”

³⁷ Cartwright, “Online Theological Ministry Preparation,” 40-54.

study. Panelists who participated in the study were offered access to the completed research. Subsequent Delphi rounds were also sent to continuing participants via email.

Proposed Instrumentation

This Delphi study entailed a modification of Cartwright's research instrumentation for identifying the best practices and programmatic activity among seminary institutions for effectively advancing spiritual formation in distance and face-to-face learning environments.

1. In Round 1, survey answers from eight open-ended questions were reviewed and revised by participants. These responses were analyzed for reoccurring themes by utilizing Apple Pages word processing software to conduct keyword searches.
2. In Round 2, using panelists' responses from Round 1, a survey was developed using a four-point Likert scale. Responses were analyzed, and respondents were given the opportunity to reverse their answers.
3. In Round 3, consensus statements were assessed from Round 2, and a dichotomous agree/disagree questionnaire was generated for the purpose of seeking consensus through the aggregation of Round 3 answers.³⁸

Email was used as the primary means of contacting panelists, and Google Forms software was utilized to collect responses.

Research Questions

After a review of the literature, a clear gap exists regarding spiritual formation in the context of distance competency-based seminary education. This research sought to answer four questions:

1. What are the practical protocols for creating a learning environment that encourages and supports teacher and student human interactions and spiritual formation across space through non-residential competency-based theological education?
2. What faculty strategies facilitate the creation of positive student-to-student, student-to-faculty, and faculty-to-student interactions in a non-residential competency-based structure?

³⁸ Ledbetter, "Online Undergraduate Spiritual," 98.

3. What experiences or assignments related to spiritual formation are non-residency competency-based students involved in as active participants in projects, presentations, and other group activities?
4. How can spiritual formation be assessed in a non-residential competency-based distance learning environment by educators?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

What are the best practices for spiritual formation in the context of distance competency-based theological education (CBTE)? To make sense of this research topic, resources in pertinent fields have been surveyed, analyzed, and synthesized into a cohesive product. This literature review considered current relevant research in spiritual formation and related fields and concerns in theological education and seminary training. This study aimed to identify a gap in the literature in the field of seminary-level CBTE generally and a significant gap in regard to spiritual formation in the context of CBTE specifically.

In trying to understand the research question “What are the best practices for spiritual formation in the context of CBTE?” two large categories emerged in this study. First, spiritual formation in general was considered. Current relevant spiritual formation resources were examined, along with research from related fields germane to the topic. Special attention was paid to literature regarding the practice of spiritual formation in the context of education. Second, relevant literature and research regarding theological education in general was examined. To fully understand these two categories, this study focused on spiritual formation and theological education in general, with a narrowed focus on spiritual formation in the context of seminary education. In the category of spiritual formation, this study surveyed spiritual formation’s place in the context of the broader category of Christian formation and narrowed its focus to subcategories that pertain to seminary education generally and CBTE specifically. Likewise, in considering seminary-level theological education, this study focused on theological education

generally, then considered the goals and modalities of seminaries, and then focused on seminary-level competency-based education specifically.

Consideration was also given to relevant research that pertains to the educational side of the current state of spiritual formation in competency-based education (CBE). This research examined theological education in general. Then, it narrowed the focus to seminary education, paying special attention to its goals and modality. Finally, this research considered current research and practices regarding CBE and then turned to literature regarding CBTE. This literature review examined the unique place of a CBTE modality in conversations regarding the role and aim seminary and its distinctive place in the discussion regarding spiritual formation.

Spiritual Formation

This review aimed to narrow its focus to relevant literature that supports the research questions concerning best practices in spiritual formation in the context of CBTE. Spiritual formation as a subset of Christian formation¹ is a massive field. This review first focused on current approaches to spiritual formation and then turned to pertinent elements of spiritual formation, such as spiritual growth, discipleship, and spiritual theology.

While a dearth of works on the subject of spiritual formation are currently available, several have proven to be relevant to the topic at hand. While a number of sources treat Christian formation and spiritual formation as synonyms, given this literature review, it seems best to consider Christian formation to be a larger category to

¹ In James Estep and Jonathan Kim's work on Christian formation, the authors consider spiritual formation to be one part of Christian formation, which includes developmental theory, psychology, anthropology personality development, and a number of other fields. James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim, eds., *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010). In this thinking, spiritual formation is a part of Christian formation, which includes the physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual elements of human development. However, in this thinking, spiritual formation is not isolated from other areas of Christian formation but an interrelated part of the whole.

which spiritual formation belongs. Likewise, considering spiritual formation in the context of Christian formation, this review established that there are important interrelated elements of Christian formation that influence spiritual formation and its various subcategories.

Approaches to Spiritual Formation

John Coe, the director of Talbot Seminary's Institute for Spiritual Formation, defines spiritual formation as "the divinely sanctioned process by which the person (spirit and body) is conformed to the image of Christ by union with the Holy Spirit and in conjunction with our will and efforts, which begins in this life and continues into the next."² Coe's approach is holistic in the sense that it acknowledges the embodied nature of the human person. Likewise, central to Coe's thinking is the starting point of spiritual formation, namely, that God acts first in revelation and personal empowerment to pursue this process. Coe writes, "As we grow older in faith, we discover that the Christian life is *more about Christ and less about our efforts*."³ Coe envisages a spiritual formation that "is about what *He has done*, and about our life 'in Christ,' and how to *open the heart* to this New Covenant life dependent on the Spirit." As a result, Coe argues for a spiritual formation that is rooted in biblical teaching, narrative identity, and a New Covenant anthropology. He contends that spiritual formation must move away from works righteousness, autonomy, and moralism toward honest self-reflection and understanding of biblical reality.⁴

² John Coe, "Introduction: TTSF501 Introduction to Spiritual Formation," Biola University, August 30, 2011, accessed November 15, 2019, video of class lecture, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n-WVzrtWsaI&list=PLDF8C44F0B87394A9>.

³ John Coe, "Resisting the Temptation of *Moral* Formation: Opening to *Spiritual* Formation in the Cross and the Spirit," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 1, no. 1 (2008): 57.

⁴ Coe, "Resisting the Temptation of *Moral* Formation," 59.

Evan Howard attempts to create an approach to spiritual formation that is inherently a work of practical theology and is intended to integrate various aspects of Christian living into the paradigm for spiritual formation. In *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation*, Howard advocates for a multifaceted approach to spiritual formation that is personal, communal, and evangelistic.⁵ He offers a cohesive system for understanding spiritual formation in the context of the Christian tradition.⁶ Howard's intent to create a specifically Christian understanding of spiritual formation leads him to create an overtly Trinitarian definition of spiritual formation: "I see Christian spiritual formation as a Spirit- and human-led process by which individuals and communities mature in relationship with the Christian God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)."⁷ Howard's contribution is helpful in light of the communal nature of the seminary experience.

In his work *Disciple*, Bill Clem builds a framework for spiritual formation around two key points: an understanding of redemptive history through biblical theology and the identity of the individual Christian.⁸ In Clem's framework, spiritual formation begins with God's self-disclosure and the reality that "God allows us to see his faultlessness and his patient and providential guidance of the nations" as he is working out salvation in world history.⁹ Further, Clem argues that through the biblical narrative, God allows human beings to understand his movement through the lives of people in the biblical narrative.¹⁰ Showing history through the lives of individuals, in Clem's thinking, is intended to help Christians understand not only the role of these people in world

⁵ Evan B. Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation: How Scripture, Spirit, Community and Mission Shape Our Souls* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018).

⁶ Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation*, 3.

⁷ Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation*, 18.

⁸ Bill Clem, *Disciple: Getting Your Identity from Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

⁹ Clem, *Disciple*, 11.

¹⁰ Clem, *Disciple*, 12.

history but also that “God reveals himself through the lives of people, and when people realize they are a part of God’s story, they become one of the most profound means of revealing God to others.”¹¹ The second pillar in Clem’s spiritual formation paradigm is the centrality of Christian identity and understanding who the Christian individual is in light of God’s self-disclosure in Christ. In Clem’s thinking, a vital element of spiritual maturation involves growing in an understanding of the story of redemption, centered on Jesus, and progressively living out a Christian identity in light of Christ’s completed work. As a result, much of Clem’s sanctification paradigm is centered on the identity or image that is being renewed by Jesus; thus, the life of the individual Christian is “God’s renewal project in process.”¹² Clem’s spiritual formation paradigm is helpful as it incorporates a biblical theology narrative identity, personal identity, and sanctification into a cohesive package.

Diane J. Chandler approaches the topic of spiritual formation from a vantage point in which almost every element of the Christian life is subsumed under her spiritual formation paradigm.¹³ Her work *Christian Spiritual Formation* considers spiritual formation in very broad terms and envisages much of human development incorporated under this larger category. Her definition of “Christian spiritual formation describes the process of being restored into the image of God where Jesus Christ in its multidimensionality by the work of the Holy Spirit”¹⁴ While Chandler’s definition is helpful, her approach to the subject is extremely broad. In her “integrated approach to human formation,” she includes the development of the spirit, emotions, relationships,

¹¹ Clem, *Disciple*, 14.

¹² Clem, *Disciple*, 61.

¹³ In several respects, Chandler’s integrated spiritual formation approach is very similar to Estep and Kim’s (*Christian Formation*) approach to Christian formation.

¹⁴ Diane J. Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wholeness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 17.

intellect, vocation, resource stewardship, and physical health and wellness all under the greater category.¹⁵ Her approach is an attempt to include a spiritual component in every area in of a person's life.

Biblical Spirituality

Given that spiritual formation involves the concept of spirituality, it seems germane to the research at hand to considered biblical spirituality and ideas related to that particular topic. Biblical spirituality, from a Christian point of view, involves an awareness of the supernatural reality of the world that people inhabit and the spiritual dimension of Christian anthropology. In his work *Christian Spirituality*, Alister McGrath considers spirituality in the context of Christian history and theology. McGrath defines Christian¹⁶ spirituality¹⁷ when he writes, "Christian spirituality concerns the quest for a fulfilled and authentic Christian existence, involving the bringing together of the fundamental ideas of Christianity and the whole experience of living on the basis of and within the scope of Christian faith."¹⁸ McGrath elucidates the difference between theology and spirituality when he writes, "Perhaps the simplest way of characterizing the relationship between theology and spirituality is to suggest that the former is about theory, and the latter the practice of the Christian life."¹⁹ In many ways, this dynamic is a particular concern of theological education in the context of a seminary setting, given that

¹⁵ Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 18.

¹⁶ McGrath argues that there are three main elements to Christian living, namely, "a set of beliefs, a set of values, and a way of life." Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 3. Fundamentally, "Being a Christian is not just about beliefs and values; it is about real life, in which those ideas and values are expressed and embodied in a definite way of living."

¹⁷ McGrath defines spirituality generally when he writes, "Spirituality concerns the quest for a fulfilled and authentic religious life, involving the bringing together of the ideas distinctive of that religion and the whole experience of living on the basis of and within the scope of that religion." McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 2.

¹⁸ McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 3.

¹⁹ McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 25.

both the transfer of information to students and the spiritual development of ministerial candidates are priorities.

Christopher Morgan and Justin McLendon develop a biblical-theological framework for Christian spirituality that ranges from the protological spiritual purpose of creation to the teleological spiritual ends of humanity.²⁰ They contend that spirituality is, in a sense, what human beings were created for, but due to sin, spirituality is, at least in part, marred.²¹ Their framework for Christian spirituality is soteriological, in the sense that Jesus's saving work—rather than human good works—is the basis for spirituality.²² Their paradigm is ontological, in the sense that they argue that a Christian's new life in Christ is both the beginning and the ongoing reality and context for Christian spirituality.²³ Their spirituality is Trinitarian, given that they advocate, like Howard and others, that spirituality flows from the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit together.²⁴ Their view of spirituality is also teleological, in the sense that they see growth and sanctification resulting in an end, namely, growth in Christlikeness.²⁵ While the authors have in mind a spiritual framework for real life, the theological categories they have created help in developing a general understanding of the subject. At the core of spiritual formation is the task of growth. Central to the task is the transformation into Christlikeness and greater participation²⁶ with Christ.

²⁰ Christopher W. Morgan and Justin L. McLendon, "A Trajectory of Spirituality," in *Biblical Spirituality*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan, Theology in Community (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 20-21.

²¹ Morgan and McLendon, "A Trajectory of Spirituality," 25.

²² Morgan and McLendon, "A Trajectory of Spirituality," 26.

²³ Morgan and McLendon, "A Trajectory of Spirituality," 27.

²⁴ Morgan and McLendon, "A Trajectory of Spirituality," 29.

²⁵ Morgan and McLendon, "A Trajectory of Spirituality," 31.

²⁶ There is some debate in the spiritual formation community regarding whether it is better to consider the Christian life to be one that is fundamentally about participation or union in Christ or imitation, that is, sharing in the Christian life. For example, Howard (*A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation*) argues for a Christ-empowered imitation, whereas Coe ("Resisting the Temptation of *Moral Formation*") emphasizes participation over imitation.

Discipleship

Discipleship is the intentional process by which one person helps another person follow Jesus. Given there are those who would argue that theological education is, at its core, a process of spiritual formation and discipleship, and given that seminary education is a process that happens in the context of community, it seems appropriate to consider discipleship as a facet of spiritual formation given the focus of this research.²⁷ There are basic practices important to this particular process. There have been a number of ways in which thinking regarding discipleship has developed that are germane to the topic of spiritual formation. Considerable time has been spent in the world of Christian higher education, for example, finding ways in which spiritual formation, in the form of co-curricular or community activities, can be encouraged in the life of students wherein at least one person invests in the spiritual growth of students.²⁸

Several evangelical schools both train and utilize spiritual direction in the context of spiritual formation as a means of discipleship.²⁹ While there are several evangelical works interacting with the subject,³⁰ the definitive work on the subject is *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* by William Barry and William Connolly. In that work, the authors write, “We define Christian spiritual direction, then, as help given by one believer to another that enables the latter to pay attention to God’s personal communication to him

²⁷ E.g., much of Paul House’s work regarding seminaries has focused on this kind of thinking. See Paul R. House, *Bonhoeffer’s Seminary Vision: A Case for Costly Discipleship and Life Together* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

²⁸ Perry L. Glanzer, Nathan F. Alleman, and Todd C. Ream, *Restoring the Soul of the University: Unifying Christian Higher Education in a Fragmented Age* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 281.

²⁹ E.g., Talbot School of Theology and Sioux Falls Seminary.

³⁰ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998); Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1979); Lovelace, *Renewal as a Way of Life: A Guidebook for Spiritual Growth* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1985); James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship”³¹ Their work regarding spiritual direction is one that centers on experience more so than focuses on faith development or a study of the Bible; however, the authors offer a number of principals regarding the context of relationship in which one might help another grow spiritually.

Spiritual Theology

Spiritual theology is the systematic study of the Christian life. It is the process by which one understands the Christian spiritual practice and studies it methodically.³² Richard Lovelace argues that “virtually all of the problems in the church including bad theology issue from defective spirituality” and that attention needs to be given to the discipline of spiritual theology.³³ Lovelace defines spiritual theology as “a discipline combining the history and the theology of Christian experience.”³⁴ He likewise elucidates the word *spiritual* as “deriving from the Holy Spirit” and “*renewal, revival, and awakening*” as words derived from the Bible that describe “the infusion of spiritual life in Christian experience by the Holy Spirit.”³⁵ In his thinking, spiritual theology is central to his practical outworking of the Christian experience, namely, how spiritual formation affects Christians’ living by the Holy Spirit in the context of community and facilitates their spiritual growth.

³¹ William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 8.

³² Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 16.

³³ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 58.

³⁴ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 11.

³⁵ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 21.

Theological Education

While James Estep rightly argues that theology is an essential part of Christian education, theological education and the task of administering it is a clear subset of Christian education as a whole.³⁶ Theological education, in this case, will include those disciplines concerning or related to systematic, biblical, and practical theological studies related to ministry preparedness. This section first considers the larger category of Christian education and then focus on seminary education and seminary modalities, along with educational approaches relevant to this study's focus, that is, best practices for spiritual formation in the context of distance seminary-level CBTE.

Christian Education

Seminary education generally and CBTE specifically are subsets of Christian education. Thus, a basic grasp of relevant literature in the field of Christian education is necessary when considering how one might discover the best practices of spiritual formation in the context of seminary generally and CBTE specifically.

In *Foundational Issues in Christian Education*, Robert Pazmiño offers a biblical, historical, and philosophical framework for Christian education. He articulates that “Christian education is the deliberate, systematic, and sustained divine and human effort to share or appropriate the knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, sensitivities, and behaviors that comprise or are consistent with the Christian faith.”³⁷ If one follows Pazmiño’s definition, then Christian education has a role to play in spiritual formation and faith development generally.

In his work *Desiring the Kingdom*, James K. A. Smith asserts, based on a number of factors, that Christian education has in some cases lost what it means to be

³⁶ James R. Estep, “What Makes Education Christian?,” in *A Theology for Christian Education*, by James R. Estep Jr., Michael J. Anthony, and Gregg R. Allison (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 26.

³⁷ Robert W. Pazmiño, *Foundational Issues in Christian Education: An Introduction to an Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 91.

Christian.³⁸ He fundamentally concludes that education ought to be *formative* rather than *informative*. Christian education—and by extension theological education—is not simply about the transfer of information but the development of human potential in light of the Christian faith. Again, Smith argues that what should be experienced in the context of Christian education is not simply the accumulation of data but the formation of worldview and the understanding of the world as the Christian God has made it and what it means to inhabit that world as humans.³⁹ Smith argues that “being a disciple of Jesus is not primarily a matter of getting the right ideas and doctrines and beliefs into your head in order to guarantee proper behavior; rather, it’s a matter of being the kind of person who *loves* rightly—who loves God and neighbor and is oriented to the world by the primacy of that love.”⁴⁰ Fundamentally, Smith links Christian education to the task of discipleship when he writes, “If the goal of Christian worship and discipleship is the formation of a peculiar people, then the goal of Christian education should be the same.”⁴¹

Seminary Education

Observationally, seminary education is one of the most prominent contexts for theological education and ministry-preparedness training. Most seminary-level training is intended to equip people for ministry and help students grow academically, practically, and spiritually. A variety of forms of ministry and seminary training exists today. Many of the conversations around theological education involve the goals and modalities of seminary education, including issues regarding online-versus-traditional seminary modalities as they relate to spiritual formation.

³⁸ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 31.

³⁹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 32.

⁴⁰ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 32-33.

⁴¹ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 220.

Considerations Regarding Seminary Modalities

In recent years, one of the most relevant conversations pertinent to seminary education has been the discussion regarding the mode and context of said education. It is not the intent of this particular review to analyze these various approaches. Rather, this review intends to present a number of the voices at work in the conversation regarding seminary modalities and theological education. This conversation is particularly relevant given the different approaches of these views and how they speak to different modalities, such as CBTE or course-based design executed either face to face or online. Given the lack of resources addressing CBTE in the seminary context (as demonstrated by this review), it was important to consider these other works to develop a backdrop for the conversation.

Historian Justo González has compiled a historical survey of theological education. In his work *The History of Theological Education*, González frames the history of Christian education in such a way that he argues that seminary education as we now know it is a relatively recent creation.⁴² The importance of his contribution is twofold. First, as a historian, he offers an overview of theological education, starting with the early church and leading up to modern history. However, it is important to note that González offers this overview to demonstrate his argument that theological education, specifically formal seminary education, is in a state of crisis.⁴³ Second, he also considers how the seminary arrived at its current state and offers a number of possible improvements for consideration, which involve returning the seminary to the local church context and rethinking how said education is executed.

⁴² Justo L. González, *The History of Theological Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 105.

⁴³ González, *History of Theological Education*, 138.

Paul House has argued for a return to spiritual formation and face-to-face interaction in the context of seminary training. He contends that the seminary conversation has focused on finances and “industrially oriented” methodologies and delivery systems.⁴⁴ He argues that a reform is necessary as he laments that “the biblically based, centuries-old belief that theological education should occur in person through mentors with peers in communities in communal places is no longer necessary for every seminary degree’s accreditation.” House does not argue that seminary should return to the traditional brick-and-mortar modality of previous generations but argues for a reform and a reimagining of how seminary education may be accomplished.⁴⁵

In response to arguments like House’s, John Cartwright has offered a biblical argument for the possibility and validity of online seminary. He argues from the New Testament that Paul understood his letters to be a legitimate form of faith development and as legitimate as face-to-face interaction.⁴⁶ While Cartwright is a proponent of the possibility of online theological education, he does so with caution, knowing that “preparation for ministry is far more than a mere movement of data for the professor’s mind to the students memory.”⁴⁷ Like House’s, Cartwright’s work is helpful in thinking through alternative approaches to the future of theological education.

Important contributions to the conversation regarding seminary modalities and spiritual formation in general come from one work by Joanne Jung and another by Stephen Lowe and Mary Lowe. Jung argues for the development of character formation in the context of online education. While her work is more pragmatic than theological,

⁴⁴ House, *Bonhoeffer’s Seminary Vision*, 22.

⁴⁵ House, *Bonhoeffer’s Seminary Vision*, 194-95.

⁴⁶ John Cartwright, “Paul and the Possibility of Absent Presence,” in *Teaching the World: Foundations for Online Theological Education*, by John Cartwright et al. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2017), 27.

⁴⁷ John Cartwright, “Past Patterns and Present Challenges in Online Theological Education,” in Cartwright et al., *Teaching the World*, 11.

Jung offers a series of best practices for how one might help students grow in the context of the online classroom. While she observes that “character formation is grounded in Christian values, borne by belief in a trine God,” her work, for the most, part focuses on “practical ideas for customizing your online courses and improving your pedagogical methodology.”⁴⁸

In *Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age*, Lowe and Lowe advocate for an online modality in the context of theological education and that such an education can mediate space and time to create learning environments conducive to spiritual formation.⁴⁹ They base their considerations first and foremost in a biblical theology of ecology and argue that such a conceptualization lends itself to spiritual formation in the context of online community. Lowe and Lowe observe that “the formational development of faith-based institutions seek to provide is as much a part of community formation as any other area of development.”⁵⁰ Central to their understanding and argument is that “spiritual formation is not a magical occurrence resulting from the presence of Christians gathered together in the same place, whether online or on campus.”⁵¹ According to Lowe and Lowe, while some would posit “that online activity by its very nature creates and contributes to isolation and disconnection from others,” they contend that it is not the mediated distance that contributes to isolation; “the reality, however, is that isolation and disconnectedness have become a part of American life.”⁵² They fundamentally argue for the possibility and validity of spiritual formation over distances as mediated by digital technology.

⁴⁸ Joanne J. Jung, *Character Formation in Online Education: A Guide for Instructors, Administrators, and Accrediting Agencies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 9.

⁴⁹ Stephen D. Lowe and Mary E. Lowe, *Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age: Spiritual Growth through Online Education* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018).

⁵⁰ Lowe and Lowe, *Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age*, 84.

⁵¹ Lowe and Lowe, *Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age*, 84.

⁵² Lowe and Lowe, *Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age*, 81.

Lowe and Lowe base their argument on what they call a biblical theology of ecology. The authors argue that within Christian Scripture is an “ecological motif” that underlines “the fecundity, diversity, and dynamic growth potential of living organisms in a defined ecosystem,” and this motif should be applied to an understanding of spiritual growth.⁵³ In their thinking, God has established “patterns of growth” that include “natural, social, and spiritual ecologies,” and seeing spiritual formation in this context allows for the proper design and execution of Christian education for spiritual growth in an online context.⁵⁴

The Seminary and Spiritual Formation

When considering best practices for spiritual formation in the context of seminary-level ministry training, there are two important facets to ponder and categories that have been the focus of various scholars. Studies have been undertaken to understand and explain spiritual formation in the context of seminary education in both face-to-face and online contexts.⁵⁵ While it may seem obvious, it is important to consider the nature of

⁵³ Lowe and Lowe, *Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age*, 37.

⁵⁴ Lowe and Lowe, *Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age*, 227.

⁵⁵ Jacob Dunlow, “The Relationship between Mentoring and Spiritual Formation among Nontraditional Theological Seminary Students” (EdD thesis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014); M. Todd Hall, “*Oro, Ergo Sum: The Pedagogy of Spiritual Formation among Protestant Seminarians in the United States: Toward a Post-Cartesian Framework*” (PhD diss., Texas State University, 2016); Jean M. Holdener, “Instructional Design: Seminary Faculty Teaching Experience and Spiritual Formation in an Online Environment” (PhD diss., Capella University, 2010); Douglas Lee James, “Theological Teaching and Spiritual Formation: How Seminary Faculty Relate Beliefs about Teaching, Learning and Spiritual Growth” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2001); Patricia A. Rhodes, “A Tale of Two Schools: The Spiritual Development of Leaders in Protestant Seminaries” (PhD diss., University of San Diego, 2014); Christopher George Royael, “Best Practices of Faculty in the Spiritual Formation of Master of Divinity Students” (EdD thesis, Oral Roberts University, 2005); Melanie L. Saint James, “The Place of Spiritual Formation in the Context of Online Theological Education: A Faculty Perspective,” (DMin project, Azusa Pacific University, 2002); Reed A. Sheard, “The Role of Spiritual Formation in the Development of Religious Leaders at George Fox Evangelical Seminary” (EdD thesis, Seattle University, 2004); Catherine Ann Snapp, “Spiritual Formation: A Case Study in Seminary Environment” (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2002); Ronald Edward Staley, “The Integration of Contemplation and Action: A Portfolio Approach to Spiritual Formation in the Seminary” (ThD diss., Boston University, 1995); Carol M. Tasker, “The Impact of Intentional Learning Experiences for Personal Spiritual Formation on Seminary Students” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2001); Asaph Waichungo M. Yusuf, “A Multivariate Analysis of Christian Spiritual Formation of Seminary Students in Two Baptist Seminaries in East Africa” (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003); Joanne Huiying Wang, “Christian Formation

spiritual formation as a priority of the seminary. James Estep argues that Christian education is, at least in part, a mode of spiritual formation.⁵⁶ Likewise, Virginia Samuel Cetuk contends that the seminary should be understood *as* spiritual formation.⁵⁷ Likewise, it is the expectation of ATS that seminary students will experience spiritual formation as part of their course of study.⁵⁸ Given that seminary is intended to prepare people for ministry, spiritual formation is also something that is being trained into students. Seminary education is intended not only to see people formed spiritually but also to see spiritual formation expressed in the competency and capacity of seminary graduates.⁵⁹

In line with the aforementioned literature, John Coe observes that many of those who are attending seminary are seeing spiritual formation as one of the purposes of their theological education.⁶⁰ These students are “serious about their spiritual life, who have a most sincere desire to grow and be used by God in service and ministry.” Yet, he notes that “these same dedicated persons are often struck [with a] burden of guilt and shame that they are not as mature as they should be.” Coe’s concern is that spiritual formation is not being practiced at the seminary level, to the spiritual detriment of future ministers and eventually their congregations. Coe writes, “My thesis or concern for my students and those believers who want to give themselves to a life of growth and ministry but are struggling with their faith is two-fold,” namely, that trying harder will not fix the

within North American Protestant Christian Seminary Education” (EdD thesis, Talbot School of Theology, 2010).

⁵⁶ Estep and Kim, eds., introduction to *Christian Formation*, 5.

⁵⁷ Virginia Samuel Cetuk, *What to Expect in Seminary: Theological Education as Spiritual Formation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

⁵⁸ Association of Theological Schools, *General Institutional Standards* (Pittsburgh: ATS, 2015), 5.

⁵⁹ Association of Theological Schools, *General Institutional Standards*, 5.

⁶⁰ Coe, “Resisting the Temptation of *Moral* Formation,” 55.

problem per se and that Christian spirituality is first and foremost about dependence on Christ.⁶¹ In Coe's mind, seminaries are tempted to focus on works theology, moral formation, or the transfer of information, at times to the exclusion of fostering a grace-based spiritual formation. He argues that the priority of the seminary is not to teach people to develop morally but to help them live in union with Christ and develop a dependence on that reality through the course of seminary study.

As a subset of theological education (which is itself a subset of Christian education), the end (or at least one of the ends) of theological ministry training as executed in the seminary is the spiritual formation of students so that they can participate in the spiritual formation of others. In his *Spiritual Theology*, Simon Chan contends for the recovery of this practice. He argues that while the job of those in pastoral ministry has become somewhat ambiguous, pastoral ministry needs to return to the conceptualization of pastor as shepherd.⁶² Chan maintains that in previous generations, "the work of the pastor was quite unambiguous," namely, the "cure of souls." He goes on to say that "the shepherd is to help the sheep assimilate and live out the spiritual life." In Chan's thinking, participating in the spiritual formation of others is the "distinguishing mark" of pastoral ministry.

However, in regard to the subject of spiritual formation in the context of seminary education, John Coe has observed that there remains a significant deficiency in the lives of seminary students.⁶³ In his chapter on "Spiritual Theology,"⁶⁴ Coe observes

⁶¹ Coe, "Resisting the Temptation of *Moral Formation*," 56.

⁶² Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 225.

⁶³ John H. Coe, "Spiritual Theology: When Psychology and Theology in the Spirit Service Faith," in *Psychology and Spiritual Formation in Dialogue: Moral and Spiritual Change in a Christian Perspective*, ed. Thomas M. Crisp, Steven L. Porter, and Gregg A. Ten Elshof (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 17.

⁶⁴ Coe ("Spiritual Theology," 19) defines spiritual theology thus: "Spiritual theology is the theological discipline that attempts to fill [the] gap of understanding in the process of spiritual growth by integrating (1) the scriptural teaching on sanctification and growth with (2) the observations, reflections, and experience (an empirical study) of the Spirit's work in the believer's spirit and experience." Chan

that there is a typical deficiency in theological ministry training, namely, in the area of competency regarding spiritual formation in the life of others.⁶⁵ He argues that “contemporary evangelical theological education has focused on doctrine and technical historical-textual studies but sometimes to the neglect of an in-depth understanding of sanctification.”⁶⁶ In this case, Coe does not mean that the theological category of sanctification has been neglected but that the spiritual theology or practical implications of sanctification have been. He contends that a more robust element needs to be present in seminary and theological ministry training.

Competency-Based Theological Education

Given the unique nature of CBTE and limited study that has been done in this area, this review first considered the most relevant work in the sphere of competency-based education (CBE) specifically. Given the limited number of resources on the subject, research in the realm of both K-12 education and higher education was considered. Then the review moved on to consider CBTE specifically.

Competency-Based Education

There is a growing body of work in recent years regarding the conversation around CBE; however, CBE is not a completely recent invention. *Competency Based Education and Training* was one of the first volumes published on the subject of CBE.⁶⁷ In this work, Eric Tuxworth argues that the origins of CBE, as a modern educational movement, can be traced back to the 1920s, though it did not take on the label

(*Spiritual Theology*, 18) defines spiritual theology thus: “Spiritual theology seeks to understand spiritual growth from beginning to end, making use of biblical and experiential data.”

⁶⁵ Coe, “Spiritual Theology,” 17.

⁶⁶ Coe, “Spiritual Theology,” 18.

⁶⁷ John W. Burke, ed., *Competency Based Education and Training* (London: Falmer Press, 1989).

“competency-based” until sometime in the 1960s.⁶⁸ Further, the movement was originally modeled after the education of teachers, but it has since been applied to a variety of fields and areas of education. In the last few years, the model has gained significant momentum in the medical profession.⁶⁹ Likewise, a CBE model has found a number of proponents in vocational education and in the sphere of K-12 public education.

In 2017, Robert Marzano published *The New Art and Science of Teaching*,⁷⁰ which was a vastly revised and updated version of an earlier work.⁷¹ Relevant to the growth of CBE, Marzano notes that the most significant difference in the two aforementioned volumes is that the newer work “implies a move toward a competency-based system.”⁷² He claims that the two volumes represent more than an update, they represent a shift not just in the author’s own thinking but in the world of education itself.⁷³

CBE-proponent Rose Colby argues that “grading systems are designed to tell us whether a student knows something on the day of a test, but fail to tell us whether the student can actually put the knowledge to use.”⁷⁴ Colby argues for a fundamental transformation and redesign in the context of K-12 education; however, the principles presented by the author apply across the board of CBE. Colby contends that a traditional course-based framework demands that curriculum drives learning, whereas in a CBE

⁶⁸ Eric Tuxworth, “Competence Based Education and Training: Background and Origins,” in Burke, *Competency Based Education and Training*, 10-11.

⁶⁹ Michael Whitcomb, “Transforming Medical Education: Is Competency-Based Medical Education the Right Approach?,” *Academic Medicine* 91, no. 5, (May 2016): 618-20.

⁷⁰ Robert J. Marzano, *The New Art and Science of Teaching* (Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press, 2017).

⁷¹ Robert J. Marzano, *The Art and Science of Teaching* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2007).

⁷² Marzano, *The New Art and Science of Teaching*, 122.

⁷³ Marzano, *The New Art and Science of Teaching*, 9.

⁷⁴ Rose L. Colby, *Competency-Based Education: A New Architecture for K-12 Schooling* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2017), 1.

model, learning pathways begin with learning (rather than curriculum), which is undergirded by curriculum that flexes to the needs of individual students.⁷⁵

In one important study, Lisa Monica McIntyre-Hite observes that there is a general gap in the literature regarding studies exploring the effectiveness and development of competencies in a CBE setting.⁷⁶ Her findings show that most studies exploring competency-based higher education involved the development of competencies in the context of course-based instructional design and traditional institutions.⁷⁷ Likewise, McIntyre-Hite argues that despite the attention given to competency-based approaches in the field of healthcare specifically, this kind of competency-based education is still primarily conducted in the context of course-based design.⁷⁸ In addition, she notes that little research has been conducted regarding competency-based education wherein “seat time or the credit hour is no longer the proxy to measures student learning and students can progress at their own pace.”⁷⁹ This observation is particularly relevant to the research at hand, given that the three seminaries that are the focus of this research offer programs that are non-linear and neither are dependent on seat time per se nor use credit hours and course completions to measure students’ progress. In her Delphi study, McIntyre-Hite develops a series of best practices, many of which revolve around training students in real-world competencies based on the input of multiple stakeholders.⁸⁰

Mike Ruyle’s work focuses on how to transition existing organizations (primarily in secondary education) from a course-based paradigm to a student-centered

⁷⁵ Colby, *Competency-Based Education*, 93.

⁷⁶ Lisa Monica McIntyre-Hite, “A Delphi Study of Effective Practices for Developing Competency-Based Learning Models in Higher Education” (PhD diss., Walden University, 2016).

⁷⁷ McIntyre-Hite, “Competency-Based Learning Models in Higher Education,” 15.

⁷⁸ McIntyre-Hite, “Competency-Based Learning Models in Higher Education,” 2.

⁷⁹ McIntyre-Hite, “Competency-Based Learning Models in Higher Education,” 6.

⁸⁰ McIntyre-Hite, “Competency-Based Learning Models in Higher Education,” 89.

competency-based framework. He argues for an “evolutionary triad,” that is, the transition of instructional leadership, classroom teachers, and students toward a CBE model.⁸¹ Ruyle’s contention is that for CBE to take hold in a school or other learning environment, movement along all areas of his triad is necessary. Ruyle argues that CBE requires shifts in curricular design that involve both teach and student and that school administrators and leaders⁸² must “model, coach, and demonstrate an evolved way of operating in classrooms” in order to bring “the paradigm shift to reality.”⁸³ In addition to these leaders, Ruyle argues for the necessity of “optimistic teachers,” that is, “those teachers who believe that they make a difference and are empowered to help their students succeed academically.”⁸⁴ Further, given the student-centered nature of Ruyle’s vision for CBE, the author contends for the necessity of increased student involvement and argues that increased involvement is exactly what CBE produces.⁸⁵

While Ruyle’s work focuses more on students than the practical application of CBE, Brian Stack and Jonathan Vander Els’s work *Breaking with Tradition* delves deeply into the concrete elements of CBE. Their work is designed to guide schools from a course-based framework to a competency-based paradigm. They define competency-based learning when they write, “In a system of competency-based learning, a student’s ability to transfer knowledge and apply skills across content areas organizes his or her

⁸¹ Mike Ruyle, *Leading the Evolution: How to Make Personalized Competency-Based Education a Reality* (Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research, 2019), 25.

⁸² In Ruyle’s (*Leading the Evolution*, 42-43) thinking, educational leaders are the tip of the spear in moving a competency-based program forward. In his thinking, without these leaders’ taking on “extreme ownership,” constantly casting vision, and advocating for this new paradigm, it will fail, regardless of teacher or student enthusiasm.

⁸³ Ruyle, *Leading the Evolution*, 31.

⁸⁴ Ruyle, *Leading the Evolution*, 61. According to Ruyle, given that CBE signifies a shift away from teacher-centered course design, teacher buy-in is essential for the success of such transitions.

⁸⁵ Ruyle, *Leading the Evolution*, 93.

learning.”⁸⁶ At the heart of Stack and Vander Els’s work is the idea of the interrelated nature of “professional learning communities” in the context of a school and how those communities support and benefit a CBE paradigm for education.⁸⁷ The authors develop assessment tools from CBE built around a modified version of Bloom’s Taxonomy.⁸⁸ They describe their vision of a CBE school when they write, “Learning outcomes emphasize competencies that include application and creation of knowledge, along with the development of important skills and dispositions.”⁸⁹ They argue that “in schools focused on competency-based learning, the fundamental purpose of grading is to communicate student achievement toward mastery of learning targets and standers”; or, to put it more simply, “grades represent what students *learn*, not what they *earn*.”⁹⁰

In *A Leader’s Guide to Competency-Based Education*, Deborah Bushway, Laurie Dodge, and Charla Long focus on the execution of CBE in a higher education context. They detail how “CBE programs may be offered in any modality or combination of modalities that include fully online, blended (combination of online and on the ground), and fully on the ground.”⁹¹ The authors contend that one of the most important features regarding CBE is the backwards design, starting with where it is desired that students might arrive and working backwards from that point to help them get there. The authors also elucidate how one would use various assessments rather than simple grades to aid students along in their development and degree completion.⁹² In this framework,

⁸⁶ Brian M. Stack and Jonathan G. Vander Els, *Breaking with Tradition: The Shift to Competency-Based Learning in PLCS at Work* (Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press, 2018), 7.

⁸⁷ Stack and Vander Els, *Breaking with Tradition*, 26-27.

⁸⁸ Stack and Vander Els, *Breaking with Tradition*, 95-108.

⁸⁹ Stack and Vander Els, *Breaking with Tradition*, 21.

⁹⁰ Deborah J. Bushway, Laurie Dodge, and Charla S. Long, *A Leaders Guide to Competency-Based Education: From Inception to Implementation* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2018), 21.

⁹¹ Bushway, Dodge, and Long, *Guide to Competency-Based Education*, 29.

⁹² Bushway, Dodge, and Long, *Guide to Competency-Based Education*, 58. The authors advocate for a variety of assessments, including performance-based, objective-based, summative (i.e., in

higher education moves beyond whether students can achieve a grade; through a series of targets and outcomes, students can demonstrate that they are able to do what their education is training them to do. Bushway, Dodge, and Long contend that the transition to a CBE program must begin with the development of administrative leadership and vision prior to designing a program but that such a transition is possible and beneficial to the task of learning.⁹³

Competency-Based Theological Education

While several volumes have been written about the current state of Christian higher education generally and theological education specifically as well as about possible improvements for seminary moving forward,⁹⁴ few works have addressed CBTE. Similar to McIntyre-Hite's findings regarding CBE in general, a review of the literature showed that there have been a number of studies that address competencies in theological education and at times this approach is called a competency-based.⁹⁵ However, these studies tend to address how to apply outcome-based design or

which instructors “determine whether a student has achieved a learning outcome or competency”), formative, and authentic (i.e., an assessment that “the manner and content of the assessment that is as close as possible to the way in which the competency will be demonstrated in an individual’s professional and or civic life”).

⁹³ Bushway, Dodge, and Long, *Guide to Competency-Based Education*, 123-36.

⁹⁴ Glanzer, Alleman, and Ream, *Restoring the Soul of the University*; Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); David S. Dokery and Christopher W. Morgan, eds., *Christian Higher Education* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

⁹⁵ Stephen A. Boersma, “Managerial Competencies for Church Administration as Perceived by Seminary Faculties, Church Lay Leaders, and Ministers” (PhD diss., Oregon State University, 1988); Edward L. Dower, “A Needs Assessment of the Seventh-Day Adventist Theological Seminary’s Master of Divinity Program as Perceived by the Graduates, Faculty, Students, and Employers of Graduates” (EdD thesis, Andrew’s University, 1980); Valerie A. Miles-Tribble, “Assessing Student Leadership Competencies and Adequacy of Preparation in Seminary Training” (PhD diss., Walden University, 2015); Thomas Edward Sibley, “A Competency-Based Ministerial Education and Training Program Developed by a Consortium of Churches, Organizations, and Educators for Columbia Christian College” (DMin project, Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1985); Theodore C. Smith, “Development of a Competency-Based Curriculum for Online Instruction in a Christian University: The Model and an Example” (PhD diss., Capella University, 2009); Richard Lee Spindle, “A Study of the Competency-Based Approach to Education and Its Utilization in Structuring a Bible College Model for Christian Education” (EdD thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1976).

observations about competencies to a typical course-based modality. For example, Theodore C. Smith's study focuses on developing curriculum, with an eye for ministry competencies, in the context of a course-based curricular design.⁹⁶ Several studies have considered how to utilize non-traditional delivery systems, with competencies in mind, to augment a traditional course-based model.⁹⁷ These models still fundamentally center around a typical linear course-based modality. None of these studies were conducted in schools facilitating CBTE curricular design in a modality consistent with the aforementioned advocates of CBE.

Few resources address CBTE as a modality juxtaposed to a typical course-based design; however, in 1977, Clyde J. Steckel and Donald R. White wrote an article entitled "Introductory Theological Interpretation as Competency-Based Education."⁹⁸ In this article, they describe their experience developing a competency-based course where not only competencies were the basis for their curricular design but also a CBE methodology⁹⁹ was embraced for instruction, learning outcomes, and the evaluation of students' work.¹⁰⁰ It would be anachronistic to understand this study as directly translatable to current models of CBTE; however, many of the elements present in current models being experimented with in this research project and the impact of those practices on seminary students are present in Steckel and White's work.

⁹⁶ Smith, "Online Instruction in a Christian University," 5-6.

⁹⁷ David Jonathan Agron, "Learning Objectives and Instructional Methods for Competency-Based Missionary Training" (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2002); Judith Ann Jonas, "An Exploration of the Impact of a Competency-Based Education and Training Approach on Ministerial Training" (EdD thesis, Oral Roberts University, 2009).

⁹⁸ Clyde J. Steckel and Donald R. White, "Introductory Theological Interpretation as Competency-Based Education," *Theological Education* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1977): 184-94.

⁹⁹ The work done by Steckel and White was funded by a grant from ATS, which seems to demonstrate that CBTE is not a new completely consideration for the organization. Steckel and White, "Introductory Theological Interpretation," 188-189.

¹⁰⁰ Steckel and White, "Introductory Theological Interpretation," 188-189.

Karla Louise McGehee has developed one of the few resources on CBTE currently available. In her case study, McGehee seeks to understand how “senior administrators, faculty and students perceive” CBTE and how those same groups “interpret their experience with” CBTE.¹⁰¹ McGehee’s study focuses on one of the three ATS-accredited seminaries offering CBTE in the fall 2018 term, which remains anonymous in her research.¹⁰² From this case study of a single institution, eight generalizations about its practice of CBTE were developed.¹⁰³ McGehee argues, based on her findings, that CBTE must be understood “as a philosophy and not another educational model.”¹⁰⁴ Given that McGehee’s study focuses only on one school, based on the very nature of the study, more research needs to be done to understand this educational modality and how it is being executed in the context of seminary-level education. Likewise, McGehee’s findings seem limited to a particular seminary reimagining its overall identity rather than one embracing elements of a CBE-type modality or framework for a theological education context.

There remain limited resources that address the current state of CBTE as it is executed at ATS seminaries or the ways in which the CBE model is being conceptualized by its modern proponents.¹⁰⁵ The primary and most comprehensive artifact for

¹⁰¹ Karla Louise McGehee, “Exploring the Perception of and Experience with Competency-Based Theological Education among Select Senior Administrators, Faculty, and Students: A Case Study” (PhD Diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary 2019), 6.

¹⁰² McGehee, “Competency-Based Theological Education,” 8.

¹⁰³ These eight generalizations are figured in McGee’s work (“Competency-Based Theological Education,” 221) and include the following: “learning in context”; “student-centric approach”; “restructured, integrative curriculum”; “increased partnership with external constituents”; “redefined faculty role”; “shift in power”; “shared ownership”; and “redefined institutional identity.”

¹⁰⁴ McGehee, “Competency-Based Theological Education,” 221.

¹⁰⁵ *In Trust*, a magazine produced by the Center for Theological Schools, has published several informal articles on CBTE that are not peer-reviewed and have primarily focused on informal interviews or reporting on CBTE events but have not produced academic research on CBTE. See Jay Blossom, “Questions for Charla Long about Competency-Based Education,” *In Trust* 27, no. 4 (2016): 8-9; Nathan Hitchcock and Greg Henson, “Competency-Based Education Has a History: And Its History Illuminates Its Limitations,” *In Trust* 28, no. 2 (2017): 15-17; Charla Long, “Credit for What You Know and Do, Not for Time in Class: The Rise of Competency-Based Education,” *In Trust* 27, no. 4 (2015): 5-9; Karen Stiller,

understanding the current state of CBTE in the context of ATS-accredited schools is a report prepared for ATS by a team of seminary leaders.¹⁰⁶ The report details the current state of the first three ATS-accredited schools offering CBTE programs. The report details everything from financial policies to some potential drawbacks to ATS schools moving forward with CBTE programs. Given that there are few dissertations, peer-reviewed articles, or monographs on CBTE, this nine-page report is the most comprehensive piece of literature to date regarding CBTE seminary training and its state in multiple institutions.

ATS CBTE Peer Group Report

The most complete literature considering CBTE is a peer group report prepared by a team for ATS. This report examines the practices of the three institutions with ATS-approved CBTE programs, i.e., the three schools which were the focus of this thesis, along with seven other schools with non-ATS-approved CBTE programs. The goal of the report is “to help seminaries determine if CBTE is right for them; and to help seminaries design and initiate CBTE programs that support their missions, meet the needs of their constituents, and follow best principles and practice for ATS members schools.”¹⁰⁷ This report explores a number of facets essential for understanding the current state of CBTE.

Values. The peer report contends that CBTE is fundamentally more than a modality; “it is a value system that forms a foundation for a renewed approach to theological education.”¹⁰⁸ The report claims that these values are more about practice

“Enthusiasts, Skeptics, and Explores: A Snapshot of the Seminary Community’s Differing Viewpoints on Competency-Based Theological Education,” *In Trust* 30, no. 2 (2019): 5-9.

¹⁰⁶ Association of Theological Schools, “Competency-Based Education Final Peer Group Report,” in *Educational Models and Practices in Theological Education Peer Groups Final Reports* (Pittsburgh: ATS, 2018), 151-159.

¹⁰⁷ Association of Theological Schools, “Competency-Based Education Final Report,” 152.

¹⁰⁸ Association of Theological Schools, “Competency-Based Education Final Report,” 152.

than framework; namely, “this value system calls us to think of theological education not as a transcended *form* of education (graduate-level, traditional courses and credits, residency requirements) but as a transcendent *function* of education.”¹⁰⁹ The functions in mind are ministry preparedness, spiritual growth, and academic development for real world service.

Common characteristics. The report details those items that are consistent in CBTE programs as they presently exist, namely, that they are customized, communal, and contextualized.¹¹⁰ They are customized in the sense that they are specific to each of the students. In the seminaries represented in the report, all students have a team that is led by a faculty member. While many programs have some sort of starting point in regard to outcomes and curricular design, the students’ team “creates a unique pathway though the degree, using resources inside and outside the seminary,” and this pathway “follows no predetermined route.”¹¹¹ Thus, student learning is non-linear in its nature. These programs are also communal in that “students travel the path in the company of peers and mentors,” though not always “face-to-face.” Thus, the modality can be distance, but it is not a requirement, and based on the flexible nature of the programs, they are not necessarily being executed in a typical online format even at a distance. Rather than using a course-based community, “credentialed faculty initiate and engage in dialogue that addresses content related to the competencies.” Finally, the programs are contextualized, meaning that “the ministry context of a student is intentional and integrated into the educational possess.” This structure allows for a strongly church-based approach to students’ seminary education.

¹⁰⁹ Association of Theological Schools, “Competency-Based Education Final Report,” 152. As a result, the report argues that theological education, at least in a CBTE modality, “needs to reinterpret itself from setting to setting to optimally fulfill its function.”

¹¹⁰ Association of Theological Schools, “Competency-Based Education Final Report,” 152-53.

¹¹¹ Association of Theological Schools, “Competency-Based Education Final Report,” 152-53.

Effectiveness of CBTE. According to the ATS peer group report, there are many unknowns that remain in the category of CBTE, given the lack of history in CBTE as compared to other seminary modalities. The report concludes that given the nascent nature of CBTE, the data is currently limited regarding effectiveness, and more research should be done.¹¹² For example, the longest-standing school offering ATS-approved CBTE programs is Northwest Baptist Seminary in Vancouver, British Columbia, which started CBTE-type programs in June 2014. While enrollment in CBTE programs continues to expand, programs are “earning high marks from relevant constituents.”¹¹³ However, according to the report, “extensive data collection will confirm the educational effectiveness of CBTE and also will help fine-tune existing program as well as meet ATS requirements.”

Gap in the Literature

At this point, spiritual formation has been addressed by many capable scholars in the field. Likewise, a number of thinkers have addressed the current state of the modern seminary and the intersection between Christian higher education and spiritual formation. However, a gap in the literature exists regarding CBTE. While a report by ATS has been compiled and several conferences have now been held, there is only one published case study that looks at the subject of CBTE and how it functions at a single institution. Much like McIntyre-Hite’s observations regarding CBE in general, the same is true of CBTE specifically: many of the studies conducted regarding a competency-based approach have been done considering the development of competency-based education learning experiences in the context of a course-based paradigm. While several

¹¹² According to the report (Association of Theological Schools, “Competency-Based Education Final Report,” 157), “Northwest Baptist Seminary, with the longest CBTE track record of any ATS school, graduated 14 students in 2017, and its retention rate is higher than the norm.” Likewise, “Sioux Falls [Seminary] has graduated six in its CBTE program and has decreased student debt by 67 percent in three years.”

¹¹³ Association of Theological Schools, “Competency-Based Education Final Report,” 157.

well done and helpful studies have been conducted regarding spiritual formation in the context of the modern Christian higher education, in both face-to-face and online contexts, there have been no studies conducted regarding spiritual formation in the context of distance seminary-level competency-based theological education.¹¹⁴ This review has demonstrated the need for such a study.

Terminology

Spiritual formation. *Spiritual formation* is the process by which a person experiences spiritual growth or development. Evan B. Howard defines Christian spiritual formation as "a Spirit- and human-led process by which individuals and communities mature in relationship with the Christian God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and are changed into ever-greater likeness to the life and gospel of this God."¹¹⁵

Distance education. *Distance education* refers to those educational processes or curriculum that occur in a non-residency format, mediated across space. Distance education tends to occur in asynchronous formats. For this research, distance refers to the execution of a course of study that is either fully or partially non-residential.

Online education. *Online education* is distance education that occurs in non-resident format across space, mediated by digital technology. This modality typically allows students to operate at an asynchronous and relatively independent pace. For this research, *online education* will refer to course-based programs that occur fully or partially through digitized courses and in an online learning environment.

¹¹⁴ John Beck Cartwright Jr., "Best Practices for Online Theological Ministry Preparation: A Delphi Method Study" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014); Kristen Ann Ferguson, "Evangelical Faculty Perceptions of Online Learning in Graduate-Level Theological Education" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016); Neal Brian Ledbetter, "Best Practices of Online Undergraduate Spiritual Formation at Select Institutions of Christian Higher Education: A Delphi Study" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 2017).

¹¹⁵ Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation*, 18.

Hybrid or blended. Whereas *online education* refers to those non-residential modalities that occur across space mediated by digital technology, *hybrid or blended* describes those educational modalities that occur through a combination of online and face-to-face contexts.

Course-based. A *course-based* design approaches curriculum from a linear, term-based framework which occurs in the confines of a specific time-frame. A course-based modality may occur in a face-to-face or online context. This modality typically envisages a class to have specific start and end dates and tends to utilize stable structures, assignments, and measures that are applied to all students in the same fashion.

Competency-based education (CBE). *CBE* describes a non-linear educational model with static outcomes and individualized methods of demonstration. In a *CBE* modality, students are mentored by appropriate and qualified faculty through various learning experiences geared to those individual students and their context, in order to complete a degree or credential.¹¹⁶ In *CBE*, educational objectives remain constant, while the methods by which students demonstrate mastery of subjects vary.¹¹⁷ This modality is made possible by non-linear non-course-based forms tailored to individual students that incorporate the evaluation of skills and abilities that students develop along with prior learning that students bring into their program.

Competency-based theological education (CBTE). *CBTE* is a model of theological education based on *CBE* wherein students complete a degree or credential in a non-linear non-course-based format tailored to individual students and executed fully or partially in students' context. In this model, students demonstrate mastery of skills and abilities (along with prior learning) through a variety of learning experiences and projects that are evaluated by a mentor team.

¹¹⁶ Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation*, 18.

¹¹⁷ Bushway, Dodge, and Long, *Guide to Competency-Based Education*, 3.

Research Hypothesis

Based on the review of literature presented in this chapter, those experts concerned with spiritual formation in the context of CBTE likely possess the same theological and practical priorities for their students as those operating in course-based curricular design. However, there may be best practices, both ideal and actual, that are novel and able to be executed in a unique fashion in the context of a CBTE curricular approach. Spiritual formation, as it is experienced by experts, may be informed to some extent by the ascribed values present in a CBTE modality and the learning possibilities it provides.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the experiences of experts, namely, educators in the context of seminary-level distance competency-based theological education (CBTE) for the purpose of discovering best practices for spiritual formation in that particular non-linear non-course-based pedagogical approach. Given the lack of literature in the area of CBTE generally and spiritual formation in CBTE specifically, a study of this kind was needed. In order to discover best practices of spiritual formation in the context of CBTE, a Delphi study was conducted to determine consensus among experts. A panel of experts from the first three ATS seminaries to offer CBTE programs was consulted, a consensus was sought through a mixed methods sequential exploratory Delphi study, and a series of best practices in this modality was developed from that consensus.

Chapter 1 of this thesis reviewed the research problem, namely, that in recent years, three ATS schools endeavored to experiment with non-linear non-residency mentor-directed CBTE programs, but little research has been done on this new modality for seminary education. These programs, while significantly different than course-based online programs, utilize many of the same tools and face the same problems of other modalities executed over distance. Likewise, while forms of competency-based education (CBE) are gaining momentum in the context of post-secondary education outside of the seminary, the study and application of this modality is currently underdeveloped in graduate-level theological training. Chapter 1 explained the need for this kind of study to explore the best practices of post-secondary seminary educators in the context of competency-based distance education (both hybrid and fully distance programs),

specifically in the task of spiritual formation in the life of students. Chapter 1 also demonstrated the benefit of examining the perception of seminary educators regarding interactions with competency-based students through distances and the establishment of best practices to encourage and facilitate discipleship and spiritual growth.

Chapter 2 reviewed the existing literature germane to the subject. This review elucidated the reality that many studies have been undertaken in the realm of spiritual formation, distance online seminary education, and the relationship between seminary education and spiritual formation and that some studies had been conducted regarding competencies and seminary education. However, this literature review also revealed that most of the studies regarding both CBE and CBTE had been conducted regarding the use of competency-based approaches in traditional course-based curricular design. The literature review discovered that there are currently very few published dissertations or monographs on seminary-level distance CBTE, particularly as it occurs in a non-course-based modality. That literature review explored one of the few resources available on the subject, namely, an ATS-peer-reviewed report that argued that research was necessary to understand the “educational effectiveness of CBTE” and that such research is also needed to “help fine-tune existing programs as well as meet ATS requirements.”¹ Therefore, chapter 2 demonstrated a gap in the literature in the area of CBTE generally and in the area CBTE and spiritual formation specifically.

This chapter describes the methodology used for collecting data and discovering to a consensus among experts in the context of CBTE at the seminary level in the realm of spiritual formation. This research involved an exploratory mixed methods Delphi study. This chapter includes a design overview, population, sample, delimitations, limitations of generalization, instrumentation, and procedures.

¹ Association of Theological Schools, “Competency-Based Education Final Peer Group Report,” in *Educational Models and Practices in Theological Education Peer Groups Final Reports* (Pittsburgh: ATS, 2018), 157.

Purpose Statement

The aim of this study was to identify best practices in spiritual formation in the context of distance seminary-level competency-based theological education by finding consensus among experts in the context of distance seminary-level competency-based theological education. This study was an exploratory sequential Delphi study with panelists from the three established ATS-accredited seminaries offering CBTE programs. The consensus discovered in this Delphi study was used as the basis for discovering best practices for spiritual formation in the context of distance seminary-level CBTE.

Research Question Synopsis

This study sought to fill a gap in the literature in the area of best practices in distance seminary-level competency-based education. The following four questions were used to guide this research:

1. What are the practical protocols for creating a learning environment that encourages and supports teacher and student human interactions and spiritual formation across space through non-residential competency-based theological education?
2. What faculty strategies facilitate the creation of positive student-to-student, student-to-faculty, and faculty-to-student interactions in a non-residential competency-based structure?
3. What experiences or assignments related to spiritual formation are non-residency competency-based students involved in as active participants in projects, presentations, and other group activities?
4. How can spiritual formation be assessed in a non-residential competency-based distance learning environment by educators?

Design Overview

This study involved a mixed methods study with an exploratory sequential design conducted as a Delphi study. John Creswell and J. David Creswell describe a mixed methods design as “combining or integration of qualitative and quantitative

research and data.”² In such a study, “qualitative data tends to be open-ended without predetermined response, while quantitative data usually included closed-ended responses such as found on questionnaires or psychological instruments.” A typical exploratory sequential design begins with qualitative inquire that leads to the building of an instrument that can be used for the execution of a quantitative study.³ This study will involve a mixed methods exploratory Delphi study in which the first round is conducted utilizing qualitative open-ended questions and subsequent rounds are conducted utilizing quantitative questionnaires (i.e., Likert-style and dichotomous-type questionnaires).

Delphi Description for This Research

The Delphi study for this research was conducted in the format of a mixed methods exploratory sequential design and based on instrumentation utilized by John Cartwright in his study on theological ministry preparation.⁴ This study began with a set of open-ended questions, in which every panelist had the opportunity to review their fellow panelists’ responses (which will be aggregated and provided anonymously to the entire panel). All panelists were given the opportunity to revise their answers in light of those responses. A second round of Likert-style questions were created based on the analysis completed in the first round of questions and will be informed by themes that emerge from that round of questions. Analysis of this round was the first attempt to arrive at some kind of consensus among participants in the subject matter.⁵ A third and final

² John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2018), 14.

³ John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2018), 84.

⁴ John Beck Cartwright Jr., “Best Practices for Online Theological Ministry Preparation: A Delphi Method Study” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 49-53.

⁵ Cartwright, “Online Theological Ministry Preparation,” 49-53.

round was administered on a dichotomous scale. As with previous rounds, this data was anonymously shared with respondents.

Population

In order to work with schools with similar standards and educational goals, only respondents from ATS schools will be considered. Currently, there are only three ATS-accredited seminaries with approved CBTE programs that have graduated students and have offered CBTE programs for more than a few months, i.e., Northwest Baptist Seminary (Vancouver, BC), Grace Seminary (Winona Lake, IN), and Sioux Falls Seminary (Sioux Falls, SD). These schools were chosen for this particular study because they are the ATS institutions that have offered CBTE programs for the longest period of time, have graduated students, and were the three ATS seminaries studied in the ATS peer group report on CBTE. Several schools started CBTE programs in 2019, and due to the embryonic nature of their programs, those institutions were not considered for this study. Given the nascent nature of CBTE, education experts are defined as those educators, both administrators and faculty members with at least 12-24 months experience with CBTE.

Sample

Based on the nature of a Delphi study a homogenous group of 9-12 experts were sought from the three ATS-accredited schools with established graduate-level CBTE seminary programs. Purposive non-probability sampling of administrators and faculty members was utilized given the nature of this mixed methods study. The goal was to seek this group of participants from the three schools with established CBTE programs and to seek those educators who are directly involved, in some way, in the CBTE programs at their respective schools.

Delimitations

Delimitations for this study took on three primary features. First, while there are a number of post-secondary approaches to ministry preparation, such as undergraduate ministry training, this study only focused on graduate-level seminary education. Likewise, the focus of this study was ATS-accredited CBTE seminary-level programs. Thus, this research neither examined CBTE programs credentialed by other accreditors nor those offered at non-accredited seminaries. This study only focused on ATS-accredited programs offering seminary-level theological degrees.

Second, this study focused on CBTE specifically. While the three ATS-accredited CBTE programs studied are a part of the larger conversation regarding CBE, by the nature of this study, the focus was on CBE in the context of theological education. Other non-theological programs or school that share this pedagogical approach were outside of the purview of this research.

Third, the focus of this study was spiritual formation in the lives of those seeking ministry preparation in the context of seminary education as experienced by experts, that is, educators involved in CBTE programs. Considerations regarding other priorities of seminary training, such as academic development or practical ministry skills, were not a focus of this particular study.

Research Assumptions

It was assumed that the ATS mandate for spiritual formation in the context of seminary education is a legitimate pursuit of those schools considered for this research and the educators who serve in those schools. It was also assumed that the experts consulted for this study were qualified to credibly answer questions for this particular research, based on their experience with a CBTE modality.

Limitations of Generalization

Given the nature of this study, there are a number of specific areas to which this study may not transfer. First, this study intended to consider best practices in the context of competency-based, rather than course-based, curricular design. As such, the best practices of the experts may not directly translate into a typical course-based curricular paradigm. Likewise, a keystone factor in CBTE is a form of non-linear personalized learning, so those practices utilized by experts may not directly apply to those instructors or administrators working in a setting in a course-based or linear course of study curricular design. In addition, CBTE as executed by the three ATS schools considered in this study is based on a personalized approach to demonstrating competency in learning outcomes. While seminaries may allow for the use of independent studies, the typical course of study at the average seminary is executed through courseware and curricular design intended to serve groups of students rather than by being tailored to individual students; thus, some of the findings may not be applicable to those operating in a more traditional format.

Second, a central pedagogical feature of these ATS-accredited CBTE schools is a mentorship team. Given the relationship in the ministry training and spiritual formation of any given student, some of the practices considered may not translate to a more traditional pedagogical approach. In a CBTE modality, specific mentor teams follow students through the life of their programs, juxtaposed to traditional course-based models in which an instructor's time with any given student typically limited to the temporal confines of a course. As a result, many of the spiritual formation practices may be developed and practiced for the length of a student's degree program rather than the length of a course.

Third, as a study focused on graduate-level seminary, this work may be less applicable to undergraduate Bible college or ministry training programs. This may be especially true given the use of prior leaning in the evaluation of the competencies and

the reality that those entering graduate degree programs may bring more to bear in prior experience than those typically entering undergraduate programs.

Fourth, while much of this study interacted with the pedagogical approach and methodology of CBE, the focus was on the spiritual formation component of CBTE. Therefore, this research may not apply to those who are not concerned with a spiritual or character elements in the context of competency-based education.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation for this Delphi study was based John Cartwright's instrument developed for his study of best practices in online theological education.⁶ As is standard with the Delphi method, the instrumentation used three rounds of questions given to experts, with the answers from those questions being shared anonymously with other respondents.

The instrumentation for Round 1 included open-ended questions. Round 1 responses were utilized in the creation of a Likert-type survey to be administered to respondents in the second round. Respondents' answers from Round 2 were utilized to create a dichotomous-style survey in Round 3. Apple Pages word processing software was used to perform content analysis and categorize Round 1 responses. Common themes were established regarding spiritual formation in the context of these CBTE programs. Larger categories with accompanying thematic statements were written into a Likert-type scale set of statements for Round 2. Google Forms software was utilized in the administration of surveys.

In Cartwright's instrumentation, "seven questions were developed using the four program learning outcomes of the Master of Divinity at ATS," and "for the most

⁶ Cartwright, "Online Theological Ministry Preparation," 49-53.

part, each question began with, ‘How specifically can an online program develop . . . ?’⁷ Likewise for this study, this kind of question was modified. Thus, seven questions were developed around the priorities of spiritual formation and guided by ATS’s study on CBTE, priorities of ATS as described in their accreditation guidelines, and reoccurring themes in the study of spiritual formation. These questions began with “How specifically can a CBTE program develop . . . ?” An eighth question solicited panelists for any comments not addressed by the first seven questions.

A pilot test was developed with a test group. Upon completion of the pilot test and the revision of questions, the Round 1 open-ended survey was distributed to Delphi-study panel participants. Upon the completion of the questionnaire by all Round 1 panelists, their aggregated responses were provided anonymously to all participants, and each participant was given the opportunity to modify their answer based on others’ responses. Round 1 was coded, and themes sought for Round 2.

Round 2 was constructed as a Likert-type scale based on those themes that emerged in Round 1. Responses were grouped according to the themes that were established through Round 1 analysis. The goal of Round 2 was “to discover where consensus exists by giving the participants an opportunity to rate the themes that emerged in Round 1 using a Likert-type survey that ranked responses on a four point scale of importance.”⁸ A four-point Likert-type scale was utilized to determine that a consensus would be a 70-percent rating on a single number.⁹ As with Round 1, and following a standard Delphi procedure, participants were given the opportunity to review the

⁷ Cartwright, “Online Theological Ministry Preparation,” 50.

⁸ Cartwright, “Online Theological Ministry Preparation,” 51.

⁹ This study will utilize that same percentage point based on the work of Cartwright. Cartwright (“Online Theological Ministry Preparation,” 50) followed a study by Paul Green and his work arguing for 70 percent as the threshold for consensus. Paul Green, “The Content of a College-Level Outdoor Leadership Course” (March 1982), ERIC, accessed December 11, 2019, <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED276546>.

responses of other participants and amend their own responses. In cases in which a survey item received consensus, participants “outside of consensus” were asked to “especially review their response and either justify remaining outside of consensus or join the consensus.”¹⁰ This intended to help to clarify why an expert remains outside of the consensus. Those statements with 70 percent of respondents choosing a 3 or 4 were aggregated and utilized in the third round of the study.

Round 3 was based on those statements from Round 2, utilizing those questions that meet the criteria to be utilized in the dichotomous questionnaire. Round 3 was based on an agree/disagree dichotomous scale. Round 3 required a 70-percent threshold a statement to reach consensus, and the survey was constructed in such a way that only those questions with 70-percent agreement were considered to have reached consensus. As with Cartwright’s research, “the aim of the Round 3 survey” will be “to reiterate the consensus discovered in Round 2 as well as provide another opportunity for review, revision, and clarification,” with non-consensus items being remove. Both rounds 2 and 3 were analyzed to ascertain consensus among experts.

Procedures

This Delphi study followed the basic instrumentation of John Cartwright’s research. Likewise, this methodology was in line with a typical Delphi study as described by Vivienne Baumfield et al.¹¹ The authors describe the Delphi method as relying “on an iterative cycle of questioning, feedback and refinement of views to maintain focus and so maximize the application of expertise to the primary concerns of the researchers.”¹² Key features of a Delphi study include an expert panel, iterations with controlled feedback,

¹⁰ Cartwright, “Online Theological Ministry Preparation,” 52.

¹¹ Vivienne M. Baumfield et al., “The Delphi Method: Gathering Expert Opinion in Religious Education,” *British Journal of Religious Education* 34, no. 1 (January 2012): 5-19.

¹² Baumfield et al., “The Delphi Method,” 8.

statistical group response, anonymity for respondents, and subsequent rounds of questions (either qualitative or quantitative).¹³ The following procedures were followed for this study:

1. A pilot test was created to ensure clarity and receive feedback for improvement for the proper development of a Delphi-study Round 1 questionnaire.
2. A group of possible pilot test respondents was contacted. Participants indicated that they understood the nature, scope, and anonymity of the study through reading and acknowledging an informed-consent document.
3. A pilot-test free-form qualitative questionnaire was distributed to each pilot test participant, who will be given two weeks to respond.
4. Feedback from the pilot-test group was used to modify the pilot test to create the Delphi-study Round 1 qualitative questionnaire, which will include seven questions beginning with “How specifically can a CBTE program develop . . . ?”
5. Experts were recruited by email from the three ATS schools featured in the ATS study on CBTE. In each round, participants indicated that they understood the nature, scope, and anonymity of the study through reading and acknowledging an informed-consent document. Respondents who completed all three rounds of the Delphi study were offered access to the research as an incentive for completing the study.
6. In Round 1, a free-form qualitative questionnaire was distributed to each participant, who was given two weeks to respond. Google Forms survey software was utilized in the administration of Round 1 questionnaires.
7. Round 1 results were collected and distributed to the panel of experts through email, and participants were given the opportunity to revise their responses.
8. Revised responses were collected and analyzed for themes. Apple Pages word processing software key word searches were used to establish common themes regarding spiritual formation in the context of CBTE programs.
9. In Round 2, a four-point Likert-type survey was created utilizing themes that emerged from the analysis of Round 1. Larger categories and thematic statements from Round 1 analysis directed the Round 2 survey.
10. The Round 2 survey was distributed to panel members, who were given two weeks to complete the survey. Google Forms survey software was utilized in the administration of Round 2 surveys.
11. Round 2 results were analyzed to discover consensus among experts. Consensus for Round 2 will be defined as a 70-percent ranking of a given answer.

¹³ Wesley Vernon, “The Delphi Technique: A Review,” *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation* 16, no. 2 (February 2009): 71-72.

12. Anonymous results were collected and distributed to all panelists through email, and participants were given the opportunity to revise their responses. Those outside of the consensus were asked to supply their reasoning for remaining outside of consensus or encouraged to join the consensus.
13. In Round 3, an agree/disagree dichotomous survey was created with the statements from Round 2 that scored a 70-percent combined ranking of 3 and/or 4.
14. The Round 3 survey was distributed to the panel members were given two weeks to complete the survey. Google Forms survey software was utilized in the administration of Round 3 questionnaires.
15. Round 3 results were analyzed for consensus, which was defined as anything with a 70-percent ranking of “agree.”
16. Round 3 results were collected and distributed to panel members through email. Panelists were given an opportunity to revise their responses. Those outside of the consensus were asked to supply their reasoning for remaining outside of consensus or encouraged to join the consensus.
17. Round 3 results were analyzed. From this analysis, conclusions were drawn regarding answers to the research questions concerning best practices for spiritual formation in the context of seminary-level distance CBTE programs. Likewise, possible applications were considered, along with questions for further study.

Conclusion

In chapter 1, research questions were established, and in chapter 2, a gap in the literature regarding those research questions was established. This research methodology attempted to constructing a solid methodological procedure by which questions around spiritual formation in the context of distance seminary-level competency-based education could be asked. By utilizing the Delphi method, this research attempted to find consensus among experts around the best practices of spiritual formation in the context of CBTE. This Delphi study sought to ascertain best practices in spiritual formation in the context of distance seminary CBTE by utilizing a panel of experts from the three ATS seminaries with established programs offering graduate-level degrees in this modality. The results of the study utilizing this methodology are described in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This research explored the best practices for spiritual formation in the context of distance seminary-level competency-based theological education (CBTE) as understood through the lived experience of experts in this particular modality. Chapter 1 identified the research problem and questions to be pursued by this research, chapter 2 identified a gap in the literature and the need for this research, and chapter 3 detailed the methodology of this research. This chapter describes the findings of the mixed methods exploratory sequential Delphi study that was conducted, discussing how questions were compiled and how responses were analyzed, and summarizing those findings. This Delphi study was conducted utilizing a mixed methods exploratory sequential design beginning with a qualitative round followed by two quantitative rounds, namely, a Likert-scale type survey followed by a dichotomous-scale survey.

Compilation Protocols

Qualified Participants

Participants were sought from the three member institutions of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) that have established CBTE programs and were the subject of a peer group report on CBTE.¹ Given the nascent nature of CBTE efforts among ATS schools, experts were defined as those with 12-24 months of experience as educators (i.e., teachers or administrators) in CBTE-type programs. Respondents were invited with an

¹ Association of Theological Schools, "Competency-Based Education Final Peer Group Report," in *Educational Models and Practices in Theological Education Peer Groups Final Reports* (Pittsburgh: ATS, 2018), 151-59.

email that briefly described the research and defined the research population sought for the Delphi panel. One hundred and eleven potential respondents were sent invitation emails, and sixteen respondents agreed to participate in the research. Four of those sixteen participated in the pilot test that preceded Round 1, and the remaining twelve made up the Delphi panel itself. At the beginning of each survey, respondents affirmed their qualification for the research (both in time spent in CBTE and their affiliation with one of the three ATS schools being considered for this study) and consented to participate in the research. Anonymity was maintained throughout the study. Participants from all three ATS schools served on the Delphi panel for this research. Respondents who completed all three rounds of the Delphi study were offered access to the research upon its completion.

Pilot Test

A qualitative open-ended questionnaire was created based on John Beck Cartwright's instrumentation.² Cartwright's work explored best practices in ministry preparation in distance online education among ATS schools. This research modified his instrument for the study of spiritual formation in distance seminary-level CBTE. The qualitative round questionnaire included seven questions beginning with the phrase "How specifically can a CBTE program develop . . . ?" and an eighth question that reads, "What are other specific areas that do not fit any of the general categories already listed above that you deem necessary for spiritual formation in CBTE?"

A pilot test was created to ensure clarity and receive feedback from pilot-test participants for the purpose of the improvement and proper development of a Delphi Round 1 questionnaire. A group of possible pilot-test respondents was contacted. Participant were required to indicate that they understood the nature, scope, and

² John Beck Cartwright Jr., "Best Practices for Online Theological Ministry Preparation: A Delphi Method Study" (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 108.

anonymity of the study through reading and acknowledging an informed-consent document as part of the questionnaire to which they responded. A pilot-test free-form qualitative questionnaire was distributed to each participant, who was given two weeks to respond. Feedback from the pilot-test group was used to modify the pilot test in order to create the Delphi study Round 1 questionnaire. The only modification made in light of pilot-test feedback was the changing of the word “teacher” to include “teacher/mentor” in light of the CBTE modality and its philosophical emphasis on the role of teachers and faculty members as mentors in the learning experience of students.

Round 1

Twelve panelists participated in the Round 1 free-form qualitative questionnaire that was modified in light of comments from pilot-test respondents. This questionnaire was distributed to each participant, who was given two weeks to respond. Round 1 results were collected, aggregated, and anonymously distributed to the panel of experts over email. Participants were given the opportunity to revise their responses after reviewing the responses of their fellow participants.

Responses, including any additions or modifications, were collected and analyzed for themes. Apple Pages and the keyword search functionality were utilized in this analysis, and through coding, six common themes regarding spiritual formation in the context of CBTE programs were established. As an exploratory sequential design, the first qualitative round of this Delphi served as the basis for the subsequent quantitative rounds. Under the six themes that were identified, seven to nine statements regarding best practices in CBTE were synthesized and created from panelists’ Round 1 quantitative responses to create Round 2 statements. These Round 2 statements were either drawn directly from a respondent’s answers or synthesized from two or more similar responses and edited into statements that could be responded to using a Likert-type questionnaire.

Round 2

In Round 2, a four-point Likert-type survey was created utilizing themes that emerged from the analysis of Round 1. Larger categories and thematic statements from Round 1 analysis directed the Round 2 survey. The Round 2 survey was distributed to panel members, who were given a two-week timeframe for completing the survey. Google Forms online survey software was utilized in the administration of Round 2 questionnaires. Round 2 results were analyzed to discover consensus among experts. Consensus for Round 2 was defined as a 70-percent ranking of a given answer. Anonymous results were collected and distributed to all panel members, and participants were given the opportunity to revise their responses. Those outside of consensus were asked to justify their reasoning for remaining outside of consensus or encouraged to join the consensus. Four consensus answers statements were discovered. Those statements that gained a cumulative 70-percent rating as either a 3 (“very important”) or a 4 (“extremely important”) were advanced to the third round of the Delphi study.

Round 3

In Round 3, a dichotomous agree/disagree survey was created with the twenty-nine statements that scored a cumulative 70-percent rating of 3 (“very important”) or 4 (“extremely important”) from Round 2. The Round 3 survey was distributed to the panel members, and they were given a two-week timeframe for completing the survey. Google Forms online survey software was utilized in the administration of Round 3 questionnaires. Round 3 results were analyzed for consensus, and Round 3 consensus was defined as anything with a 70-percent ranking of “agree.” Round 3 results were collected and distributed to panel members in order to allow them to revise their reasons. Those outside of consensus were asked to either justify their position or consider joining the consensus. Twenty-eight (of the twenty-nine) statements found consensus among experts to develop best practices in spiritual formation for distance seminary-level CBTE in the Delphi panel of experts’ lived experience.

Summary of Findings

This section details the findings of this three-round mixed methods exploratory sequential Delphi study. In Round 1, eight open-ended questions were asked of the panel of experts. The twelve-person panel responded to those questions, and their responses were analyzed and coded into six themes. Round 2 Likert-scale-type questions were developed from the reoccurring themes found in Round 1, and questions were developed from the panelists' responses. Consensus responses were identified, and some of those who chose to remain outside of consensus shared their rationale for remaining outside of the consensus. The final round, Round 3, took the questions that had scored a combined 70-percent rating of 3 ("very important") and 4 ("extremely important") and generated a dichotomous questionnaire for the purpose of finding consensus around best practices. Twenty-eight best practices found consensus from this Delphi panel.

Round 1

A free-form eight-question survey was developed for Round 1 panelists for the purpose of identifying themes in distance seminary-level CBTE that could be utilized to find consensus around best practices in that modality (see appendix 2). Serving as the qualitative round of this mixed methods research, an eight-question survey, modified from Cartwright's instrument, which focused on ministry preparation in distance online seminary-level education, was utilized and modified for the study of spiritual formation in a distance seminary-level CBTE modality. This questionnaire was pilot tested before being distributed to the Delphi panel and modified to include "mentor/teacher" rather than only "teacher."

Panelists were given two weeks to respond to the survey. Their responses were aggregated and shared anonymously with the entirety of the Delphi panel. The panelists were given one week to review these responses and make any modifications to their own answers (see appendix 5). After panelists were given the opportunity to modify their answers, responses were analyzed utilizing Apple Pages and keyword searches following

coding practices. Six major themes were identified from the twelve-person Delphi panelists' responses and were grouped under these six themes as listed below:

1. Foundational Paradigm and Training for Mentors and Students in CBTE
2. Curricular Design and Spiritual Formation in CBTE
3. Mentors and Spiritual formation in CBTE Programs
4. Spiritual Formation, CBTE, and Local Context and Faith Communities
5. Student-Student and Mentor-Student Interactions for Spiritual Formation in CBTE
6. Student-Centered CBTE Considerations for Spiritual Formation

Responses fell under these six themes, and fifty statements were synthesized from respondents' Round 1 answers, with seven to nine statements located under each theme (see appendix 3). While frequency was considered in developing the thematic statements, which captured possible best practices, it was not the only factor under consideration. Comments particularly germane to a theme that had emerged were also included.

Round 2

A Round 2 four-point Likert-style questionnaire was developed based on the major themes that emerged in Round 1 and synthesized thematic statements formed from that analysis. This survey was sent to the twelve-person Delphi panel, eleven of whom responded (91.6-percent response rate). The panelist who had not responded to the initial email and other communications within survey response parameters was not contacted again.

Panelists were asked to rate thematic statements that described CBTE practices derived from the Round 1 panel's responses on a four-point scale: 1 ("not at all important"), 2 ("somewhat important"), 3 ("very important"), and 4 ("extremely important"). The threshold for consensus as described by this research methodology was 70 percent.

Table 1. Round 2 survey with percentages, STD, and mean: Foundational paradigm and training for mentors and students in CBTE programs

#	Question	Level of Importance				Mean	STD
		4	3	2	1		
1	Establish clear CBTE program guidelines with students at the onset of their program	54.5	45.5	0.0	0.0	3.55	0.498
2	Build spiritual formation into the program's introduction	63.6	9.1	9.1	18.2	3.18	1.190
3	Communicate early in a student's program the logic of CBTE structures and practices	45.5	45.5	9.1	0.0	3.36	0.640
4	Delineate the spiritual formation responsibilities of the church and the seminary at the onset of a student's CBTE program	45.5	18.2	9.1	27.3	2.82	1.270
5	Clarify expectations at the onset of a student's CBTE program, for how they and their mentor team will engage in spiritual practices together	27.3	36.4	9.1	27.3	2.64	1.150
6	Train mentors to facilitate interactions for spiritual formation in the context of CBTE curricula	36.4	9.1	36.4	18.2	2.64	1.140
7	Train mentors to understand a CBTE program as a context for a discipleship process	45.5	27.3	9.1	18.2	3.00	1.130
8	Create an understanding for students, that seminary is a place to develop, including in the context of spiritual formation	45.5	54.5	0.0	0.0	3.45	0.500

Table 2. Round 2 survey with percentages, STD, and mean: Foundational curricular design and spiritual formation in CBTE programs

#	Question	Level of Importance				Mean	STD
		4	3	2	1		
1	When establishing spiritual formation competencies, assess practice rather than spiritual growth	9.1	45.5	36.4	9.1	2.55	0.78
2	Create rubrics for assessing spiritual formation competencies	18.2	18.2	18.2	45.5	2.09	1.16
3	Assess spiritual formation assignments interactively	36.4	9.1	36.4	18.2	2.64	1.15
4	Create spiritual formation specific assignments	18.2	18.2	36.4	27.3	2.72	1.05
5	Create spiritual formation specific competencies or learning outcomes	27.3	18.2	36.4	18.2	2.55	1.07
6	Incorporate spiritual formation holistically in a CBTE curriculum across subject matter	54.5	27.3	0.0	18.2	3.18	1.11
7	Design CBTE spiritual formation curricula around engagement with Scripture	27.3	72.7	0.0	0.0	3.27	0.44
8	Design CBTE spiritual formation curricula around engagement with the practice of spiritual disciplines	18.2	36.4	27.3	18.2	2.55	0.98
9	Emphasize reflective learning as a key to encourage spiritual formation in learning experiences	54.5	18.2	9.1	18.2	3.09	1.16

Table 3. Round 2 survey with percentages, STD, and mean: Foundational mentors and spiritual formation in CBTE programs

#	Question	Level of Importance				Mean	STD
		4	3	2	1		
1	Students receive a mentor team who is specifically responsible for the student through the life of their program	54.5	27.3	18.2	0.0	3.36	0.77
2	Students receive a mentor team who is specifically responsible for the student through the life of their program, in which team members focus on different areas of the student's development	36.4	27.3	18.2	18.2	2.82	1.13
3	Students receive at least one mentor who is specifically responsible for the student's spiritual formation through the life of their program	45.5	0.0	18.2	36.4	2.55	1.37
4	Students receive a team in which all members are concerned in-part with spiritual formation on some level, regardless of the mentor's specific area of responsibility	18.2	54.5	0.0	27.3	2.64	1.06
5	Mentors communicate consistently and intentionally with the student for the purpose of creating a context for the student's spiritual formation	36.4	36.4	9.1	18.2	2.91	1.08
6	Design CBTE curricula in which the relationship with mentors is essential to the completion of competencies	45.5	36.4	9.1	9.1	3.18	0.94
7	Encourage mentors to personally engage with students beyond evaluating assignments	45.5	27.3	27.3	0.0	3.18	0.83
8	Mentors engage in the spiritual life of students (e.g., pray with and for students)	45.5	36.4	9.1	9.1	3.18	0.94
9	Mentors regularly encourage students to consider the impact of learning on their spiritual formation through asking spiritual application questions across subject matter	54.5	27.3	0.0	18.2	3.18	1.11

Table 4. Round 2 survey with percentages, STD, and mean: Foundational spiritual formation, CBTE, and local contexts and faith communities

#	Question	Level of Importance				Mean	STD
		4	3	2	1		
1	Mentors are recruited from a student's personal or ecclesial context	36.4	45.5	18.2	0.0	3.18	0.72
2	Students are active participants in the ministry of a local faith community	72.7	18.2	9.1	0.0	3.64	0.64
3	Students accomplish assignments through spiritual experiences in their local faith community	27.3	63.6	9.1	0.0	3.18	0.57
4	Students accomplish assignments through spiritual experience in the context of their home life	18.2	63.6	18.2	0.0	3.00	0.60
5	Assignments reinforce the student's context (work, home, faith community) as the primary place where spiritual formation occurs	63.6	36.4	0.0	0.0	3.64	0.48
6	Assignments create products for a student's local faith community (e.g., sermons, curriculum, literature)	36.4	27.3	27.3	9.1	2.91	1.00
7	Learning outcomes are customized to a student's personal or ecclesial context	54.5	36.4	9.1	0.0	3.45	0.65

Table 5. Round 2 survey with percentages, STD, and mean: Foundational student-student and mentor-student interactions for spiritual formation in CBTE

#	Question	Level of Importance				Mean	STD
		4	3	2	1		
1	One-on-one mentor-student interactions are built into learning experiences	36.4	54.5	0.0	9.1	3.18	0.83
2	Create onsite student gatherings or intensives focused on student-to-student interaction	27.3	36.4	27.3	9.1	2.82	0.94
3	Require onsite student gatherings or intensives as part of a student's program	27.3	27.3	27.3	18.2	2.64	1.06
4	Utilize digital technology (e.g., video conferencing) for regular mentor-to-student synchronous interaction	72.7	27.3	0.0	0.0	3.73	0.45
5	Utilize digital technology (e.g., video conferencing) for regular student-to-student synchronous interaction	45.5	18.2	27.3	9.1	3.00	1.04
6	Establish learning cohorts for students	36.4	27.3	27.3	9.1	2.91	1.00
7	Establish smaller spiritual formation groups for students	9.1	0.0	63.6	27.3	1.91	0.79
8	Facilitate co-curricular experiences (e.g., shared meals, recreational meetings) for students to build relationships	9.1	27.3	36.4	27.3	2.18	0.94

Table 6. Round 2 survey with percentages, STD, and mean: Foundational student-centered CBTE considerations for spiritual formation

#	Question	Level of Importance				Mean	STD
		4	3	2	1		
1	Students take personal responsibility for the forward progress of their CBTE program	90.9	9.1	0.0	0.0	3.91	0.28
2	Considerations are given to an individual student's learning style in the development of their CBTE program	45.5	36.4	18.2	0.0	3.27	0.75
3	Develop customized plans for nurturing an individual's spiritual formation in their CBTE program	45.5	18.2	27.3	9.1	3.09	1.00
4	Mentors utilize student-centered design for spiritual formation CBTE curricula	36.4	45.5	9.1	9.1	3.09	0.89
5	Students develop personal goals in regard to spiritual formation in the context of their CBTE program	45.5	36.4	0.0	18.2	3.09	1.08
6	Students learn how to assess their curricular spiritual formation progress in their CBTE program	36.4	36.4	9.1	18.2	2.91	1.08
7	Create space for student-generated curricular ideas	54.5	9.1	36.4	0.0	3.18	0.94
8	Customize CBTE learning plans around a student's lived spiritual experience	36.4	36.4	18.2	9.1	3.00	0.95
9	Adapt to the student's needs through the life of their CBTE program in regard to spiritual formation	45.5	36.4	0.0	18.2	3.09	1.08

In Round 2, four statements found consensus with 70 selecting a particular rating:

1. Of the panelists, 72.7 percent indicated that it was “very important” to “design CBTE spiritual formation curricula around engagement with Scripture.”
2. Of the panelists, 72.7 percent indicated that it was “extremely important” that “students are active participants in the ministry of a local faith community.”
3. Of the panelists, 72.7 percent indicated that it was “extremely important” to “utilize digital technology (e.g., video conferencing) for regular mentor-to-student synchronous interaction.”
4. Of the panelists, 90.9 percent indicated that it was “extremely important” that “students take personal responsibility for the forward progress CBTE program.”

Those items that reached consensus were sent to the panelists who were outside of consensus, and all of the panelists had the opportunity to review the other panelists’ anonymous responses and to change their own responses. While no panelists changed their answers, those outside of consensus took the opportunity to explain their rationale for remaining outside of consensus (see appendix 2).

In Round 2, a consensus was found around the practice of “designing CBTE spiritual formation curricula around engagement with Scripture.” The panel consensus regarded this practice as “very important.” One panelist remaining outside of the consensus offered an explanation for their response in which they indicated that this practice was “extremely important” rather than “very important.” They explained that while they would prefer “the student/mentor team choose to engage with Scripture . . . , the reality is that many students start seminary with minimal integration of Scripture into their lives and need to be introduced [and] taught how to integrate Scripture and spiritual disciplines into their lives.” This same panelist noted that “we are pretty good at resourcing various Christian books, but I have yet to experience too many students steeped in Scripture” (see appendix 5).

Another panelist, whose response was outside of consensus in the same fashion on this statement (i.e., they selected that it was “extremely important” to “design CBTE spiritual formation curricula around engagement with Scripture”) also offered clarification concerning their choice to remain outside of consensus. They argued that

“knowledge of God and knowledge of self are foundational components to formation and growth.” They elucidated their point further by adding, “Our distorted perceptions of reality in these areas need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.” They noted the importance of this practice, and thus their choice to remain outside of the consensus, by adding that “Scripture is the basis for this renewal [of the mind], for without it we have blindspots [sic] and gaps in our understanding.” In terms of the critical role in their mind that Scripture places in CBTE spiritual formation curricula, they remarked that Scripture “is the only way we can get out of our subjectivity and allow ultimate reality to shape us” (see appendix 5).

In the context of distance CBTE and spiritual formation, panelists came to a consensus that it was “extremely important” that “students are active participants in the ministry of a local faith community.” However, several panelists chose to remain outside of consensus and offered a rationale for their responses. One panelist indicated that they believed that active participation in the ministry of a local faith community was “very important.” However, they also noted that “not all students can be active participants in the ministry of a local community of faith.” They likewise explained that life circumstances such as relocating or being between churches might interfere with the ability to be in ministry in a local faith community, but “it is clearly preferable that the student be involved in ministry.” However, in this panelist’s mind, if this practice was “extremely important,” rather than “very important” as they had indicated, then CBTE programs would need to “turn students away (or suspend their program if they’ve already stated) until they are so engaged” in a local faith community (see appendix 5).

Another panelist on the subject of the importance of this involvement in ministry in a faith community indicated that it was only “somewhat important.” Their concern was around the phrase “local faith community,” and they gave the example of someone who might be “a chaplain at a long-term care center that requires the student to lead worship services on Sunday several times a month,” which might preclude him or

her from ministry involvement in a local faith community. This same panelist noted that they have worked with a variety of students who “are leaders of secular and faith-based non-profits who are not part of a local faith community for a variety of reasons” but are “connected with other Christians.” Likewise, they mentioned their own life and experience “living and ministering abroad” wherein they were not necessarily part of a local faith community but still “communed with other Christians on a regular basis and those people were from across the globe” (see appendix 5).

While the panel found consensus around the statement that it is “extremely important” that “students take personal responsibility of the forward progress of their CBTE program,” one panelist indicated that this practice was “very important.” They explained that not every practice can be “extremely important” and, at the same time, noted that in their experience, the mentors and students connect “at least every couple of months” and that this mentor-to-student connection is “very important” (see appendix 5).

Similarly, on the consensus that it is “extremely important” that “students take personal responsibility for the forward progress of their CBTE program,” a panelist who indicated that this practice was “very important” noted that student responsibility for his or her program is important, but “the mentors also accept some responsibility”; thus, it is “not the sole responsibility of the student.” The panelist clarified that they would have to indicated that this point was “extremely important” “if it were the student’s sole responsibly” and that in this practice, it would be helpful to note where responsibility is “shared with mentors [and] when it is ‘extremely’ dependent on the student” (see appendix 5).

The twenty practices that scored a combined 70-percent ranking of 3 (“very important”) and 4 (“extremely important”) were aggregated to create the Round 3 dichotomous-scale survey for this research (see appendix 3).

Round 3

The third and final round of this mixed methods exploratory sequential study consisted of a qualitative dichotomous survey. In Round 3, nine of the original twelve Delphi panelists responded (75-percent response rate). The two panelists who participated in Round 2 but chose not to participate in Round 3 were contacted; one panelist indicated that they did not want to participate in Round 3, while the other did not respond to communication during the window for the survey.

Those questions that gained a 70-percent or higher combined 3 (“very important”) and 4 (“extremely important”) from the Round 2 study were transformed into twenty-nine agree/disagree dichotomist statements regarding the importance of a given practice in the execution of distance seminary-level CBTE. According to experts in the practice of a CBTE modality, twenty-eight of the twenty-nine statements found consensus identifying a series of best practices (see Table 7).

The only statement that did not move from Round 2 through Round 3 (i.e., the statement for which consensus was not found) was that “students receive a mentor team who is specifically responsible for the student through the life of their program.” Only 66.7 percent of respondents agreed that this was an “important” practice. Of the twenty-eight best practices that found consensus, fifteen statements were unanimously agreed upon, eleven statements received 88.9 percent agreement (with 8 of 9 remaining panelists agreeing), and two statements received 77.8 percent agreement (with 7 of 9 remaining panelists agreeing).

As with Round 2, those panelists whose responses fell outside of consensus in Round 3 were encouraged to join the consensus or to offer a rationale as to why they desired to remain outside of the consensus. One respondent did change their statement (i.e., “One-on-one mentor-student interactions are built into learning experiences”). In this case, a panelist amended their response from “disagree” to “agree,” bringing that particular statement to unanimous consensus. Additionally, not every panelist offered a

rationale for their answers that fell outside of consensus. However, several explanations were provided by the Delphi expert panelists.

Table 7. Round 3 consensus statements organized by theme with percentages

Theme	Practice to be regarded as important	Agree	Disagree
Foundational Paradigm and Training for Mentors and Students in CBTE	Establish clear CBTE program guidelines with students at the onset of their program	100.0	0.0
	Build spiritual formation into the program's introduction	100.0	0.0
	Communicate early the logic of CBTE program structures and practices	100.0	0.0
	Train mentors to understand a CBTE program as a context a discipleship process	100.0	0.0
	Create an understanding for students that seminary is a place to develop, including in the context of spiritual formation	100.0	0.0
Curricular Design and Spiritual Formation in CBTE Programs	Incorporate spiritual formation holistically in a CBTE curriculum across subject matter	100.0	0.0
	Design CBTE spiritual formation curricula around engagement with Scripture	88.9	11.1
	Emphasize reflective learning as a key to encourage spiritual formation in learning experiences	100.0	0.0
Mentors and Spiritual Formation in CBTE Programs	Students receive a team in which all members are concerned in-part with spiritual formation on some level, regardless of the mentor's specific area of responsibility	77.8	22.2
	Mentors communicate consistency and intentionality with the student for the purpose of creating a context for the student's spiritual formation	88.9	11.1
	Design CBTE curricula in which the relationship with mentors is essential to the completion of competencies	88.9	11.1
	Encourage mentors to personally engage with students beyond evaluating assignments	100.0	0.0
	Mentors engage in the spiritual life of students (e.g., pray with and for students)	88.9	11.1
	Mentors regularly encourage students to consider the impact of learning on their spiritual formation through asking spiritual application questions across subject matter	100.0	0.0
	Mentors are recruited from a student's personal or ecclesial context	88.9	11.1
Spiritual Formation, CBTE, and Local Contexts and Faith Communities	Students are active participants in the ministry of a local faith community	100.0	0.0
	Students accomplish assignments through spiritual experiences in their local faith community	100.0	0.0
	Students accomplish assignments through spiritual experience in context of their home-life	100.0	0.0
	Assignments reinforce the student's context (work, home, faith community) as the primary place where spiritual formation occurs	88.9	11.1

Table 7 Continued

Theme	Practice to be regarded as important	Agree	Disagree
Spiritual Formation, CBTE, and Local Contexts and Faith Communities	Learning outcomes are customized to a students' personal or ecclesial context	88.9	11.1
	One-on-one mentor-student interactions are built into learning experiences	100.0	0.0
Mentor-Student Interactions for Spiritual Formation in CBTE	Utilize digital technology for regular mentor-to-student synchronous interaction (e.g., video conferencing).	88.9	11.1
	Students take personal responsibility for the forward progress of their CBTE program	88.9	11.1
Student-Centered CBTE Considerations for Spiritual Formation	Considerations are given to an individual student's learning style in the development of their CBTE program	77.8	22.2
	Mentors utilize student-centered design for spiritual formation CBTE curricula	88.9	11.1
	Students learn how to assess their spiritual formation curricular progress in their CBTE program	88.9	11.1
	Customize CBTE learning plans around a student's lived spiritual experience	100.0	0.0
	Adapt to the student's needs through the life of their CBTE program in regard to spiritual formation	100.0	0.0

One theme that emerged in Round 1 was “spiritual formation, CBTE, and local contexts and faith communities.” While the panel formed a consensus around every statement that advanced to Round 3 in this theme, only four of the six statements were unanimously agreed upon. Several panelists whose responses were outside of the panel’s consensus offered clarity on their reason for remaining outside of the consensus.

The consensus of panelists agreed that it was important that “assignments reinforce the student’s context (work, home, faith community) as the primary place where spiritual formation occurs,” one panelist offered clarification as to why they disagreed with this statement. They noted that “students engaged in formal theological education do not necessarily learn best for all assignments in the students’ context for all topics.” Likewise, they noted a need to “push students out of their contexts” to increase their “ethnohermeneutic learning and their intercultural competency development.” This panelist expressed some concern around this consensus and suggested a particular “ethnocentric mindset” that was antithetical to “Jesus’ gospel message [that] redemption is for all people, all nations.” This panelist likewise noted that “theological education

must include as a central focus of its education to develop the mind, skills and heart to minister outside of the student's context." Another panelist also gave their rationale for not agreeing with this statement, noting that they thought that learning outcomes should tend toward stability "from one context to another." They noted that "the means of creating or demonstrating those outcomes [should] be highly customizable to the context" and thus applicable in various contexts such as a local faith community (see appendix 7).

Under the theme "mentors and spiritual formation in CBTE programs," one panelist disagreed with the consensus view that "mentors communicate consistently and intentionally with the student for the purpose of creating a context for the student's spiritual formation." The panelist outside of consensus indicated that they would prefer to "foster an environment in which the student takes greater responsibility for themselves as opposed to modeling dependence on the initiative of others" (see appendix 7). While this statement falls outside of the consensus view for the statement at hand, it, at the same time, seems consistent with the consensus view (88.9-percent agreement) that "students take personal responsibility for the forward progress of their CBTE program." This dissenting statement does, however, seem to shift the weight of responsibility in the panelist's understanding toward the student rather than the mentor or mentor team (see Table 7).

Under the same theme, the statement that "students receive a team in which all members are concerned in-part with spiritual formation on some level, regardless of the mentor's specific area of responsibility" found consensus. One panelist who fell outside of consensus agreement on the topic noted that spiritual formation responsibly was beholden to the size of the team, that is, if the mentor team is large enough (this panelist noted that they work on mentor teams consisting of three mentors), then it was not a necessity that "all members are concerned in-part with spiritual formation at some level." This panelist added that if a mentor is chosen based on some kind of expertise and was not focused on spiritual formation, then it would not necessarily be a detriment to the

student provided that the other mentors “carried that weight” of concern for spiritual formation for the team. However, this panelist did note that it might “be generally unhelpful if one or more mentors were somehow suspicious about or antagonistic toward spiritual formation” (see appendix 7).

Finally, under the theme “Student-Centered CBTE considerations and spiritual formation,” 89.9 percent of panelists agreed with the statement that “mentors utilize student-centered design for spiritual formation CBTE curricula.” The panelist who remained outside of consensus commented that the phrase “student-centered design” is “too unstable” and puts “too much burden on the individual.” This panelist argued that “if I were going to ‘center’ something, it would be on outcome-centered, or maybe even tradition-centered.” At the same time, they offered that “the design of the program should take the individual into account” and should consider the student’s “present development, their personality, their relationships, their learning style, etc.” (see appendix 7).

Conclusion

Chapter 1 identified research questions, chapter 2 identified the notable gap in the literature concerning CBTE and the need for this research, and chapter 3 described the research methodology to be undertaken. Here in chapter 4, the actual research and data collected was described. Chapter 5 offers an interpretation of the study related to the research questions being asked, thoughts on its contribution to the literature on the subject, strengths and weakness, and suggestions for potential further research that might be conducted.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This research explored best practices in spiritual formation in the context of distance seminary-level competency-based theological education (CBTE). For this study, a mixed methods sequential exploratory design was employed and executed as a Delphi study with an expert panel of educators and administrators working in a CBTE-type modality. This chapter first answers the research questions that guided this study by offering an analysis of the results, then provides recommendations for the practice of spiritual formation in the context of distance seminary-level CBTE, then considers the strengths and weakness of the study and the contributions this research makes to the precedent literature, and finally considers areas of further study.

Analysis of Results

Research Question and Methodology

The purpose of this mixed methods exploratory sequential Delphi study was to answer the following four questions:

1. What are the practical protocols for creating a learning environment that encourages and supports teacher and student human interactions and spiritual formation across space through non-residential competency-based theological education?
2. What faculty strategies facilitate the creation of positive student-to-student, student-to-faculty, and faculty-to-student interactions in a non-residential competency-based structure?
3. What experiences or assignments related to spiritual formation are non-residency competency-based students involved in as active participants in projects, presentations, and other group activities?
4. How can spiritual formation be assessed in a non-residential competency-based distance learning environment by educators?

To answer these questions, a homogenous panel of experts was recruited for the purpose of seeking consensus around best practices for spiritual formation in distance seminary-level CBTE. The panel was made up of twelve educators and administrators serving at one of the three ATS seminaries with established CBTE programs.

In Round 1, an open-ended qualitative questionnaire was prepared for the Delphi panel. This questionnaire was made up of eight questions, with seven questions beginning with the phrase “How specifically can a CBTE program develop . . . ?” and an eighth question that reads, “What are other specific areas that do not fit any of the general categories already listed above that you deem necessary for spiritual formation in CBTE?” Their responses were analyzed for themes, and statements were developed from panelists’ responses. Six themes accompanied by six to nine statements detailing CBTE practices emerged from the analysis. A total of fifty statements emerged from Round 1 to be considered by panelists in subsequent quantitative rounds.

In Round 2, the fifty statements that emerged in Round 1 were organized into a four-point Likert-type survey. Items that found 70-percent agreement among experts were considered to be in consensus. Those panelists whose responses were outside of consensus were asked to consider joining the consensus or offering a rationale for why they remained outside of it.

In Round 3, those statements from Round 2 that had a 70-percent total combined response of 3 (“very important”) or 4 (“extremely important”) were used to create a twenty-nine-statement dichotomous agree/disagree survey. Those statements that received 70-percent or greater rating were considered to have reached a consensus. A consensus was found around twenty-eight of the twenty-nine statements.

Analysis of Results

The research questions explored in this study focused on best practices regarding spiritual formation in the distance seminary-level CBTE modality and included

a focus on items such as teacher-to-student interaction, student-to-student interaction, assignments, evaluation, and learning environments. The twenty-eight best practices discovered through this Delphi study help to answer the research questions of this study. Based on the developing nature of CBTE as it is currently being conceptualized in ATS seminaries, this study was the first of its kind.

The first theme that emerged involved preparing students and mentors with a basic understanding of a CBTE modality. The theme was labeled “foundational paradigm and training for mentors and students in CBTE.” Consensus was found around five statements that emerged in Round 1:

1. Establish clear CBTE program guidelines with students at the onset of their program.
2. Build spiritual formation into the program’s introduction.
3. Communicate early the logic of CBTE program structures and practices.
4. Train mentors to understand a CBTE program as a context a discipleship process.
5. Create an understanding for students that seminary is a place to develop, including in the context of spiritual formation.

CBTE, as it is being expressed in the three ATS schools, is a non-linear non-course-based modality that stands in contrast to a typical course-based seminary experience. Thus, it seems very logical that the expert panelists would arrive at a consensus around statements that encourage preliminary education for participants on the subject (e.g., training for mentors, explanation of program structures and practices). Likewise, given that seminary, by its very nature, is a unique kind of post-secondary education, it seems logical to explain to students and work into the program early on the concept of spiritual formation and its development early in the students’ program.

These consensus statements help discover best practices concerning several research questions (RQs), that is, RQ1 and RQ2. For example, in regard to practical protocols that create positive learning environments for human relationships and interactions in terms of spiritual formation (RQ1) as well as those strategies that help

create positive interactions in the CBTE modality (RQ2), these foundational activities seem aimed to develop a framework for interactions spiritual formation-type interactions. Likewise, these practices also seem geared to support students and educators, that is, mentors and mentor teams, in understanding the modality and how a student's program will be executed. This foundation seems particularly important in light of the significant differences between a competency-based learning modality (specifically as it is envisaged by CBTE in a non-residential format) and a traditional course-based model.

The second theme that emerged in Round 1 was centered around curricular design, namely "curricular design and spiritual formation in CBTE programs." A consensus was discovered in Round 3 around three best-practice statements:

1. Incorporate spiritual formation holistically in a CBTE curriculum across subject matter.
2. Design CBTE spiritual formation curricula around engagement with Scripture.
3. Emphasize reflective learning as a key to encourage spiritual formation in learning experiences.

It seems that these three statements reflect several of the embedded values of those executing seminary education in a CBTE modality. In terms of curricular design, this panel understood that spiritual formation was part of the seminary endeavor as a whole; content was not simply organized under spiritual formation competencies or set of practical theology learning objectives alone. Likewise, given the nature of theological education, the panel's assessment that there is a need for spiritual formation curricula to be designed around Scripture seems particularly pertinent to seminary education and those fields for which students are being prepared.

These three statements help to answer, in part, RQ3 (which focuses on experiences and assignments) and RQ4 (which focuses on spiritual formation assessment). Of critical importance to RQ4 and the assessment of spiritual formation is the idea of reflective learning. It seems that if reflective learning is being engaged as part

of the curricular design, it may help educators in considering the lived experience of students when evaluating spiritual formation competencies rather than assessing the accumulation of knowledge about spiritual formation. Regarding RQ3 and experiences and assignments, it seems that, according to the consensus of the expert panel, integrating Scripture into spiritual formation curricula and spiritual formation concepts into the entire program are ways to effectively develop students in terms of spiritual formation in the context of their CBTE program.

The third theme that was considered revolved around mentors and spiritual formation in distance seminary-level CBTE programs. The Delphi panel formed a consensus around seven statements under the theme “mentors and spiritual formation in CBTE”:

1. Students receive a team in which all members are concerned in-part with spiritual formation on some level, regardless of the mentor’s specific area of responsibility.
2. Mentors communicate consistency and intentionality with the student for the purpose of creating a context for the student’s spiritual formation.
3. Design CBTE curricula in which the relationship with mentors is essential to the completion of competencies.
4. Encourage mentors to personally engage with students beyond evaluating assignments.
5. Mentors engage in the spiritual life of students (e.g., pray with and for students).
6. Mentors regularly encourage students to consider the impact of learning on their spiritual formation through asking spiritual application questions across subject matter.
7. Mentors are recruited from a student’s personal or ecclesial context.

Mentorship is one of the defining features of CBTE as it is being practiced in the context of ATS seminaries. Credentialed mentors, typically academic mentors holding doctoral degrees, help, operating with a foundational curricula framework help maintain the graduate level nature of CBTE programs. Mentors are the primary connection between the student and the seminary and typically work with a student

through the life of their degree. As a result, this theme revolving around the relationship between mentors and spiritual formation touches on all four of the RQs for this research. For example, the second practice listed under this theme above involves consistent and intentional communication for the purpose of creating a context for students' spiritual formation. In terms of faculty strategies for positive faculty-to-student interaction, the Delphi panel agreed that mentors should engage with students in a co-curricular fashion by personally relating to them beyond the evaluation of assignments and likewise in the spiritual life of the student (e.g., pray with and for the student). In terms of experiences or assignments in a non-residential modality, the panel identified that mentors should be recruited from the students' personal or ecclesial context. In this case, members from the mentor team, while potentially at a distance from the seminary itself, could be in the local context of the student. And finally, this theme and the practices enumerated also help answer RQ4, which focuses on how spiritual formation can be assessed in a non-residential situation. As mentioned above, if mentors are in a student's local context, then they can assess the student's progress in that context. Likewise, when assignments are designed in such a way that the student's relationship with his or her mentor is essential for completing competencies, the mentor evaluates the student's ability from inside the context of a relationship rather than evaluating a paper that addresses spiritual formation.

The fourth theme that emerged from the responses of the Delphi panel was in regard to local context and faith communities:

1. Students are active participants in the ministry of a local faith community.
2. Students accomplish assignments through spiritual experiences in their local faith community.
3. Students accomplish assignments through spiritual experience in context of their home-life.
4. Assignments reinforce the student's context (work, home, faith community) as the primary place where spiritual formation occurs.
5. Learning outcomes are customized to a students' personal or ecclesial context.

6. One-on-one mentor-student interactions are built into learning experiences.

In many ways, the manner in which the CBTE modality addresses the issue of distance between the students and the seminary is through mentors' encouraging students to understand their local context as a learning environment and to execute assignments and learning experiences in that context. An evident hallmark of this modality, according to the consensus of the Delphi panel, is the integration of seminary experience with students' life and ministry context.

This theme is essential for addressing RQ3 regarding learning experiences and assignments for non-residential students vis-à-vis CBTE and spiritual formation. In many ways, according to the consensus of the Delphi panel, students' CBTE program is intended to be shaped by their local context (e.g., ministry, home life) as a learning environment and primary context for completing spiritual formation assignments. This focus on context seems to reinforce the need for at least some mentors to emerge from students' local context. Likewise, this approach also seems critical to RQ4 and how one assesses spiritual formation in a non-residential fashion, that is, by local mentors' working with students in their local context as they execute practical assignments in that context (e.g., students' local church).

The fifth theme that emerged focused on mentor-to-student and student-to-student interactions, namely, "foundational student-student and mentor-student interactions for spiritual formation in CBTE." In this case, while several statements were developed from the comments of Round 1, the panelists were divided on their opening with the student-to-student elements, and a consensus could not be discovered in Round 2 (see table 5). The themes that did immerge involved mentor-to-student interactions during the life of students' program. Consensus was discovered around two statements:

1. Utilize digital technology for regular mentor-to-student synchronous interaction (e.g., video conferencing).
2. Students take personal responsibility for the forward progress of their CBTE program.

The first practice regarding the utilization of digital technology in CBTE seems to be a common practice in distance education. However, the second practice appears to set the tone of the mentor-student relationship in a CBTE modality, namely, that students take responsibility for the forward progress of their program. In this case, it is the responsibility of students to engage the curricula and to complete assignments within their personal timeframe.

Personal responsibility is essential for answering, in part, RQ3 regarding learning experiences. Students' responsibility for the forward progress of their degree program is a distinctive feature of the CBTE learning experience. In this non-linear non-course-based modality, educators are not offering lectures to the students. Rather, by design, students set the pace for their program and thus set the pace for the execution of assignments, and such pace-setting changes how students experience those assignments. This practice becomes clearer still when set against the background of the competency-based process. Students are responsible for working on an assignment or learning outcome until they can demonstrate competency to their mentor team's satisfaction. This pace likewise informs RQ4 regarding the assessment of spiritual formation, at least in the sense that it is accomplished in the timing of students' execution of their program.

The final theme that emerged was around the student-centered nature of CBTE as a modality. This study discovered consensus around five best practices under the theme "student-centered CBTE considerations for spiritual formation":

1. Considerations are given to an individual student's learning style in the development of their CBTE program.
2. Mentors utilize student-centered design for spiritual formation CBTE curricula.
3. Students learn how to assess their spiritual formation curricular progress in their CBTE program.
4. Customize CBTE learning plans around a student's lived spiritual experience.
5. Adapt to the student's needs through the life of their CBTE program in regard to spiritual formation.

CBTE programs, as they are being executed by the three ATS seminaries, are intended to flex around students' life and needs. While this theme helps, in part, to answer all four of the research questions considered in this study, it explicitly helps to consider RQ3 and RQ4 around the creation of experiences and assignments related to spiritual formation in this modality and the assessment of those assignments, respectively. According to the panel's consensus, in the development of a program, there should be a focus around students' life, needs, and learning style. Simultaneously, when it comes to assessing students, students should "learn how to assess their spiritual formation curricular progress" and presumably, at least in part, participate in the conversation regarding the assessment of their spiritual formation competency.

The twenty-eight best practices discovered in this study answered the four research questions presented here. For example, this research asked, "What are the practical protocols for creating a learning environment that encourages and supports teacher and student human interactions and spiritual formation across space through non-residential competency-based theological education?" (RQ1). Among other things, the experts on this Delphi panel emphasized the need for students to execute their program in the learning environment of their local context, to have mentors from that context, and to set a foundation for the unique modality early in their program.

This research also asked, "What faculty strategies facilitate the creation of positive student-to-student, student-to-faculty, and faculty-to-student interactions in a non-residential competency-based structure?" (RQ2). Some of the best practices that spoke to the heart of this question were intentionality on the part of mentors to communicate with students in various ways and the creation of certain co-curricular and extracurricular relational space.

In terms of curricular and program considerations, this research asked, "What experiences or assignments related to spiritual formation are non-residency competency-based students involved in as active participants in projects, presentations, and other

group activities?” (RQ3). Likewise, this research also asked, “How can spiritual formation be assessed in a non-residential competency-based distance learning environment by educators?” (RQ4). A variety of practices emerged regarding experiences and assignments and their assessment. Regarding assignments, some of the most pronounced practices involved student-centered design, executing assignments in local contexts (e.g., ministry), and integrating spiritual formation across subjects in CBTE curricula. In regard to assessment, several practices spoke to the evaluation of spiritual formation in a CBTE modality. Still, again, these practices revolved around individual students and their demonstrating competency in a local context. Likewise, students’ own ability to be self-reflective and assess their own progress in the life of their program were also considered to be important by the panel.

Recommendations for Practice

Twenty-eight best practices emerged through the course of this mixed methods exploratory sequential design. The Delphi panel of experts arrived at a consensus around twenty-eight practices, and these practices may prove helpful for practitioners of seminary-level CBTE specifically or CBTE educators generally. However, these practices might be most beneficial for those seeking to develop non-residential seminary-level CBTE-type programs. Likewise, given the focus on theological education, these practices would likely help those developing CBTE-type programs for the undergraduate level as well. Four specific recommendations emerge for those intending to create programs utilizing a similar modality as the three schools that were that were considered in this study. Specifically, it will be essential for schools seeking to create CBTE-type programs to develop CBTE orientation for educators and students, establish mentors with clear roles and expectations, consider contextual learning in CBTE, and conceptualize a clear philosophy of curricular design specific to CBTE. These four considerations are elucidated below.

CBTE Orientation for Educators and Students

In terms of a recommended practice for schools looking to establish CBTE-type programs, orientation for both educators and students must be developed. Given the relative newness of the CBTE modality, as it is being envisaged and executed at the seminary level, both students and educators need to be familiarized to the model, especially as a program is being developed. As it is understood, CBTE is notably different than a typical course-based design. While outcomes-based curricular design is not a new idea, the CBTE modality's mechanics may be foreign to students. For example, the manner in which students complete assignments or work through program outcomes by demonstrating competencies will likely be a novel idea to many students. Likewise, educators (i.e., faculty members, teachers, and administrators) who might be more familiar with a course-based design will need to become conversant with the practices of a CBTE modality.

As noted by the panel, the CBTE framework and expectations for mentors and students needs to be established at a program's onset. In terms of spiritual formation, the panel noted it was important for students to understand that seminary is a place to develop and that spiritual formation ought to be worked into the earliest stages of students' program. Likewise, the Delphi panel also found agreement around the concept that those serving as mentors need to understand that the learning experiences into which they are entering with students are a discipleship process. Mentorship is not a new idea for seminary professors; however, the particular type of intentionally in CBTE mentorship may differ from the previous post-secondary experience of some teachers.

The panel of experts agreed that the logic of CBTE-type structures should be explained to participants at a program's onset. Arguably, it seems best that this would be done as part of the application and matriculation process. This level of paradigmatic clarity seems necessary for mentors who are evaluating competencies. Likewise, students need to understand that a project or assignment is not complete until competency (or

mastery) is demonstrated. This expectation seems to be particularly important in spiritual formation, given the self-reflective assessments that the panel agreed are one of the best practices of this modality.

CBTE and Mentor Development

Those schools interested in developing CBTE-type programs need to understand the central role of the mentor. Likewise, it seems vital that schools developing CBTE-type programs create strategies for training mentors to help students succeed in a CBTE framework generally and in spiritual development specifically. According to the Delphi panel, mentors need to understand that spiritual formation is a wholistic concern of CBTE programs and, therefore, at least in part, every mentor's concern. This understanding seems especially important if spiritual formation is to be integrated across every area of the CBTE curriculum, in line with the best practices suggested by this study.

Likewise, in light of this research's findings regarding non-residential programs, it seems critical for schools to think about how mentors will operate in the field and assess spiritual formation (along with other competencies) in students' context. As I discuss below, the panel saw the context of students' personal life as the primary place where spiritual formation should occur and their CBTE program should be executed. Therefore, it seems essential that mentors have some connection to students' context. Seminaries can follow the standards of its accreditors when considering qualifications for academic-type mentors. They also need to consider how contextual mentors will be recruited, vetted, and trained and how those mentors will be empowered to evaluate spiritual formation in the context of students' life and ministry in a fashion consistent with graduate-level education. The credentials of contextual-type mentors also become relevant if schools looking to develop CBTE-type curricula seek to create programs that meet the standards of an accrediting body.

CBTE and Contextual Learning

If schools are looking to develop non-residential CBTE programs with the kind of real-time practical ministry-based assignments enumerated in the best practices agreed upon by the Delphi panel for this research, an understanding of contextual learning is necessary. The panel agreed on several items in this regard, including the idea that students' personal and ministry context is the primary place for spiritual formation to occur. The panel also agreed that it is important for students to execute their programs and assignments in the life of the local church. Likewise, the panel found it to be vital that students serve in ministry in a local church during the course of their program. Therefore, schools developing a CBTE program need to create processes that encourage practical contextual learning. Schools might consider initiating church-based or denominational partnerships as well as locating churches that could serve as a learning environment for students. Likewise, it seems critical to consider these kinds of partnerships if schools determine that they want students to execute their program in ministry.

The panel agreed that it is important for mentors to be recruited from students' context. As mentioned above, these kinds of mentors seem critical to non-residential CBTE. Schools ought to consider the type of credentialing and experience mentors might need in order to serve in students' context. Likewise, they ought to consider what kind of development systems would need to be put in place to ensure that contextual mentors can evaluate work that is intended to demonstrate competency at the graduate level. Likewise, in light of the best practices discovered through this research, it is recommended that these mentors ought to have clarity on how they will evaluate spiritual formation competencies in the context of students' CBTE-type program, in their life, and in their ministry.

CBTE Curricular Design and Execution

A course-based curricular design typically works in a linear term-based fashion. Likewise, while program objectives are contained in a school's academic catalog, smaller learning outcomes are typically the domain of a class unit and its faculty. To attain a student-centered, mentor-guided, and individualized course of study, it seems necessary for schools to utilize a backward-design approach. If schools want to create programs like those being executed in the three ATS schools studied in this research, then they need to consider the kind of graduates they are hoping to see formed (in this case, in terms of spiritual formation competencies) and find a way to enable the execution of such programs in a non-residential format. Likewise, schools will need to develop innovative ways to deal the cost of a non-linear curricula that is not restricted by typical credit and term limitations. For example, the CBTE schools that were the focus of this study utilize a subscription model rather than a cost-per-credit model.

A CBTE program is not intended, arguably, to be developed for autodidacts to work through an independent-study-type curriculum in a learning vacuum. Instead, CBTE educators want to create a learning environment in which students can develop competencies with the help of a mentor team. Therefore, it will be vital for schools to consider the types of graduate-level competencies they are seeking to achieve in the life of their students. Likewise, a framework must rightly conceptualize student-led learning in a way that encourages self-reflective evaluation of spiritual formation competencies while not leaving students entirely to their own devices in their context. CBTE-type curricula need to be designed with the student-mentor relationships in mind. As the panel agreed, a spiritual formation curriculum must be developed in order to be evaluated in the context of the mentor relationship. Thus, it seems best for schools to start with competencies and execute a backward-design approach that incorporates student-centered learning (which can be tailored to a student) and thoughtful and consistent evaluation by

mentors (with at least some of them evaluating students in the context of their life and ministry).

Concluding Remarks

In closing, it is helpful to consider several items: (1) the weakness and strengths of the study, (2) the study's contribution to the literature base, (3) areas for potential further research, and (4) a general evaluation of the research experience.

Weaknesses

Some of this study's weaknesses are based on the available population for the study, and others are based on the instrumentation itself. First, the limitation of the population is considered. Second, weaknesses and possible improvements of the instrument itself are considered.

One of the weaknesses of a Delphi study is that the panel is drawn from a non-randomized homogenous sample. Based on the nature of the study and the set of available respondents, a non-probability sampling was utilized. As a result of the homogenous sample, generalizations are, to some extent, limited.¹

Based on the developing nature of CBTE, only a limited sample population was available. This research focused on a specific set of schools from which to draw a population, that is, the three ATS-accredited schools with established CBTE programs. As a result, there was a narrow group of educators who could participate in the study. Likewise, CBTE, as it is currently being expressed, is a relatively new modality and thus the need to describe an expert as someone with 12-24 months of experience. Given that this modality is still lacking in longevity, "expert" is defined as someone with as little as twelve months of experience in this educational model.

¹ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2018), 150-52.

The textual, digital nature of the first round left the panelists, to some extent, to interpret questions and prevented them from easily asking clarifying questions. This format also lacked a venue in which to seek clarity or ask follow-up questions of the panelists. A phenomenological-type interview, for example, could have created space for semi-structured questions followed by real-time follow-up questions rather than open-ended questions that leave room for confusion on the part of panelists.

Likewise, given the nature of this Delphi study, the instrument itself was driven by the expert panelists. Therefore, only questions that emerged from the panel's responses were considered in generating the twenty-eight best practices enumerated in this research. By design, this result narrowed the data being collected by the quantitative rounds.

Finally, the subject of teaching and assessing spiritual formation is a challenging one. Therefore, this research was limited to best practices in spiritual formation in distance seminary-level CBTE as understood by the participating experts. Likewise, based on the research's delimitation, the lived experience of students experiencing spiritual formation curricula was outside of the purview of this research.

Strengths

Not unlike the research's weakness, strengths for this study were found in the population studied, the instrument used in pursuing the research questions at hand, and the uniqueness of the study itself.

The purpose of a Delphi study "is to determine the extent of agreement over a given issue (consensus measurement) and in doing so, to overcome the disadvantages normally found in group or committee decision making."² As a result, the instrument's strength is found in discovering an expert opinion through a panel's lived experience. The

² Wesley Vernon, "The Delphi Technique: A Review," *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation* 16, no. 2 (February 2009): 70.

anonymity provided by the Delphi study allows experts to freely express their opinion, and a strength of this instrumentation is the avoidance of groupthink. By design, the anonymity provided by the instrument allows various experts to interact with and consider the opinions of other experts without the potential partiality that comes from knowing the identity of the other participants.

Regarding the population, given that there are only three ATS-accredited schools currently with established CBTE programs, it was tenable to recruit participants from all three schools to serve on the panel. While the population was homogenous and the number of schools limited, this research was able to look at all of the established ATS-accredited schools offering these kinds of programs.

Finally, as described in the literature review, there are very few studies examining CBTE, with only one published dissertation on the subject. This study explored an area where there was a significant gap in the literature and was a first of its kind study, that is, a Delphi Study covering, generally, all three schools with CBTE programs and, specifically, the area of spiritual formation.

Contribution to the Literature

As demonstrated in Chapter 3, while there has been significant work accomplished around spiritual formation, seminary training, and distance education, there remains little in the way of research regarding CBE generally and CBTE specifically. As was demonstrated, many of the studies regarding the application of competencies in educational settings aim to understand how considerations around competency might apply to a course-based design rather than to consider how to design competency-based programs and curricula. This is true of education generally and of theological education specifically.

This study was the first to consider the expert opinion of educators across the three established ATS seminaries and thus was able to discover consensus around the

topic at hand, that is, CBTE. Likewise, this is the first study that considered spiritual formation in CBTE specifically and how it is accomplished in this modality in non-residential formats.

Proposed Future Study

Regarding further study, while this study focused on spiritual formation, more research should be done on CBTE. For example, spiritual formation is one of four student development spheres that ATS requires seminaries to focus on for accreditation. This study could be modified and repeated to discover distance seminary-level CBTE best practices in these other three areas: academic, vocational, and human development. Likewise, given that the panel could not reach a consensus around student-to-student interaction, a study is in order. Perhaps a phenomenological study could be undertaken, with administrators responsible for developing programs, that could seek to discover best practices for student-to-student interaction in CBTE. Likewise, given the developing nature of CBTE and the burgeoning interest in this modality, a study examining how schools implement such a program is also in order.

Finally, this study was originally intended to be conducted in two phases. The second phase was to add to this Delphi study site visits and semi-structured interviews with administrators of the three schools which were the focus of this study. Questions for those interviews were to be developed from the findings from the Delphi panel of experts. Based on the Delphi study's ability to answer the RQs for this research, and the resulting 28 best spiritual formation CBTE practices that were developed, a second phase was not required. Likewise, the global pandemic and various travel restrictions made it untenable to travel to the three ATS seminaries which were the focus of this study. Executing what was intended to be a second phase of this study could still prove fruitful in furthering the conversation regarding CBTE and could further explore best practices in spiritual formation in the context of CBTE and further build on this study.

Conclusion

This study identified an area of research, that is, spiritual formation in the context of distance seminary-level CBTE-type programs, and considered appropriate questions for this inquiry. This research also discovered a gap in the literature on CBE generally and CBTE specifically. A research methodology was developed and a study conducted with experts on the subject, and those experts arrived at twenty-eight best practices. Those practices were analyzed, and suggestions were made regarding how a seminary might employ these best practices in the development of new seminary-level CBTE programs, with particular attention paid to considerations regarding non-residential programs and spiritual formation components of those programs.

This first-of-its-kind study considered spiritual formation in the context of distance seminary-level competency-based theological education. Given that every ATS seminary is presumably seeking to graduate competent students who can engage in the world from a spiritual perspective, it is helpful to understand a novel approach that three schools are using to equip students. Likewise, this study proved helpful in understanding how schools are trying to envision theological education that prepares students for real-life ministry as well as in attempting to engage the seminary endeavor afresh in the twenty-first century to that end.

APPENDIX 1

SAMPLE PANEL INVITATION EMAIL TEXT

Greetings (name here),

My name is Andrew Pack and, in addition to my role at Western Seminary as the Director of Online Learning and my work at Sioux Falls Seminary as a Kairos affiliate professor, I am also a doctoral student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Over the next several months, I hope to be conducting research that seeks to establish consensus on the best practices for spiritual formation in the context of competency-based theological education. The nature of my research involves recruiting educators and administrators who have experience with competency-based seminary students.

During my research I noted that, due to your role at (school name here), you are likely to have an interest in CBTE. My initial question for you is whether or not you might be interested in participating in my research. I am more than happy to provide much greater detail about the nature of the study and the commitment required for the study if you are indeed interested. Thank you so much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Andrew Pack

APPENDIX 2

ROUND 1 QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How specifically, can a CBTE program develop practical protocols for creating learning environments which encourage and support teacher/mentor and intentional student interactions across space through non-residential learning experiences in a competency-based structure?
2. How specifically, can a CBTE program develop practical protocols for creating learning environments which encourage and support spiritual formation across space through non-residential learning experiences in a competency-based structure?
3. How specifically, can a CBTE program develop strategies to facilitate the creation of positive student to student interactions in a non-residential, competency-based structure for spiritual formation?
4. How specifically, can a CBTE program develop strategies to facilitate the creation of positive teacher/mentor to student interactions in a non-residential, competency-based structure for spiritual formation?
5. How specifically, can a CBTE program develop strategies to facilitate the creation of positive student to teacher/mentor interactions in a non-residential, competency-based structure?
6. How specifically, can a CBTE program develop learning experiences or assignments related to spiritual formation for non-residency, competency-based students to be involved in as active participants in projects, presentations, and other activities?
7. How specifically, can CBTE programs develop methods for educators to assess spiritual formation in a non-residential, competency-based learning environment?
8. What are other specific areas that do not fit any of the general categories already listed above that you deem necessary for spiritual formation in CBTE? Please give examples and explain why you feel they need to be included.

APPENDIX 3

ROUND 2 QUESTIONNAIRE

The following statements were organized into a 4-point Likert-type survey. The answers to the eight questions from this Round 1 survey were compiled and categorized into six themes that emerged from panelists' responses. Fifty statements were developed and organized under these six themes. Respondents were asked to rate each statement 4 ("extremely important"), 3 ("very important"), 2 ("somewhat important"), or 1 ("not important").

Foundational Paradigm and Training for Mentors and Students in CBTE Programs

1. Using the given options, please rate each statement on its level of importance in best regarding best practices for spiritual formation in the context of CBTE
2. Establish clear CBTE program guidelines with students at the onset of their program
3. Build spiritual formation into the program's introduction
4. Communicate early the logic of CBTE program structures and practices
5. Delineate the spiritual formation responsibilities of the church and the seminary at the onset of a student's CBTE program
6. Clarify expectations at the onset of a student's CBTE program, for how they and their mentor team will engage in spiritual practices together
7. Train mentors to facilitate interactions for spiritual formation in the context of CBTE curricula
8. Train mentors to understand a CBTE program as a context a discipleship process
9. Create an understanding for students that seminary is a place to develop, including in the context of spiritual formation

Curricular Design and Spiritual Formation in CBTE Programs

1. When establishing spiritual formation competencies, assess practice rather than spiritual growth
2. Create rubrics for assessing spiritual formation competencies
3. Assess spiritual formation assignments interactively
4. Create spiritual formation specific assignments
5. Create spiritual formation specific competencies or learning outcomes
6. Incorporate spiritual formation holistically in a CBTE curriculum across subject matter
7. Design CBTE spiritual formation curricula around engagement with Scripture
8. Design CBTE spiritual formation curricula around engagement with the practice of spiritual disciplines
9. Emphasize reflective learning as a key to encourage spiritual formation in learning experiences

Mentors and Spiritual Formation in CBTE programs

1. Students receive a mentor team who is specifically responsible for the student through the life of their program
2. Students receive a mentor team who is specifically responsible for the student through the life of their program, in which team members focus on different areas of the student's development
3. Students receive at least one mentor who is specifically responsible for the student's spiritual formation through the life of their program.
4. Students receive a team in which all members are concerned in-part with spiritual formation on some level, regardless of the mentor's specific area of responsibility
5. Mentors communicate consistency and intentionality with the student for the purpose of creating a context for the student's spiritual formation
6. Design CBTE curricula in which the relationship with mentors is essential to the completion of competencies
7. Encourage mentors to personally engage with students beyond evaluating assignments
8. Mentors engage in the spiritual life of students, e.g., pray with and for students

9. Mentors regularly encourage students to consider the impact of learning on spiritual formation through asking questions

Spiritual Formation, CBTE, and Local Contexts and Faith Communities

1. Mentors are recruited from a student's personal or ecclesial context
2. Students are active participants in the ministry of a local faith community
3. Students accomplish assignments through spiritual experiences in their local faith community
4. Students accomplish assignments through spiritual experience in context of their home-life
5. Assignments reinforce the student's context (work, home, faith community) as the primary place where spiritual formation occurs
6. Assignments create products for a student's local faith community (e.g., sermons, curriculum, literature)
7. Learning outcomes are customized to a student's personal or ecclesial context

Student-Student and Mentor-Student Interactions for Spiritual Formation in CBTE

1. One-on-one mentor-student interactions are built into learning experiences
2. Create onsite student gatherings or intensives focused on student-to-student interaction
3. Require onsite student gatherings or intensives
4. Utilize digital technology for regular mentor-to-student synchronous interaction (e.g., video conferencing).
5. Utilize digital technology for regular student-to-student synchronous interaction (e.g., video conferencing).
6. Establish learning cohorts with mentors and students
7. Establish smaller spiritual formation groups for students
8. Facilitate co-curricular experiences (e.g., shared meals, recreational meetings) for students to build relationships

Student-Centered CBTE Considerations for Spiritual Formation

1. Students take personal responsibility for the forward progress of their CBTE program

2. Considerations are given to an individual student's learning style in the development of their CBTE program
3. Mentors utilize student-centered design for spiritual formation CBTE curricula
4. Students learn how to assess their spiritual formation curricular progress in their CBTE program
5. Develop customized plans for nurturing an individual's spiritual formation in their CBTE program
6. Students develop personal goals in regards to spiritual formation in the context of their CBTE program
7. Create space for student-generated curricular ideas
8. Customize CBTE learning plans around a student's lived spiritual experience
9. Adapt to the student's needs through the life of their CBTE program in regard to spiritual formation

APPENDIX 4

ROUND 3 QUESTIONNAIRE

The following statements were organized into a dichotomous agree/disagree survey. The statements that received 70 percent of respondents indicating that a practice was either 3 (“very important”) or 4 (“extremely important”) in Round 2 made up the twenty-nine statements of Round 3. The twenty-nine statements were organized under these six themes.

Foundational Paradigm and Training for Mentors and Students in CBTE Programs

1. Using the given options, please indicate if you agree or disagree that each item is an important best practice for spiritual formation in the context of CBTE
2. Establish clear CBTE program guidelines with students at the onset of their program
3. Build spiritual formation into the program’s introduction
4. Communicate early the logic of CBTE program structures and practices
5. Train mentors to understand a CBTE program as a context a discipleship process
6. Create an understanding for students that seminary is a place to develop, including in the context of spiritual formation

Curricular Design and Spiritual Formation in CBTE Programs

1. Incorporate spiritual formation holistically in a CBTE curriculum across subject matter
2. Design CBTE spiritual formation curricula around engagement with Scripture
3. Emphasize reflective learning as a key to encourage spiritual formation in learning experiences

Mentors and Spiritual Formation in CBTE programs

1. Students receive a mentor team who is specifically responsible for the student through the life of their program
2. Students receive a team in which all members are concerned in-part with spiritual formation on some level, regardless of the mentor's specific area of responsibility
3. Mentors communicate consistency and intentionality with the student for the purpose of creating a context for the student's spiritual formation
4. Design CBTE curricula in which the relationship with mentors is essential to the completion of competencies
5. Encourage mentors to personally engage with students beyond evaluating assignments
6. Mentors engage in the spiritual life of students, e.g., pray with and for students
7. Mentors regularly encourage students to consider the impact of learning on spiritual formation through asking questions

Spiritual Formation, CBTE, and Local Contexts and Faith Communities

1. Mentors are recruited from a student's personal or ecclesial context
2. Students are active participants in the ministry of a local faith community
3. Students accomplish assignments through spiritual experiences in their local faith community
4. Students accomplish assignments through spiritual experience in context of their home-life
5. Assignments reinforce the student's context (work, home, faith community) as the primary place where spiritual formation occurs
6. Learning outcomes are customized to a student's personal or ecclesial context

Student-Student and Mentor-Student Interactions for Spiritual Formation in CBTE

1. One-on-one mentor-student interactions are built into learning experiences
2. Utilize digital technology for regular mentor-to-student synchronous interaction (e.g., video conferencing).

Student-Centered CBTE Considerations for Spiritual Formation

1. Students take personal responsibility for the forward progress of their CBTE program
2. Considerations are given to an individual student's learning style in the development of their CBTE program
3. Mentors utilize student-centered design for spiritual formation CBTE curricula
4. Students learn how to assess their spiritual formation curricular progress in their CBTE program
5. Students develop personal goals in regards to spiritual formation in the context of their CBTE program
6. Customize CBTE learning plans around a student's lived spiritual experience
7. Adapt to the student's needs through the life of their CBTE program in regard to spiritual formation

APPENDIX 5

ROUND 1 RESPONSES

Question 1: How specifically, can a CBTE program develop practical protocols for creating learning environments which encourage and support intentional teacher/mentor and student interactions across space through non-residential learning experiences in a competency-based structure?

- The regular and intentional one-on-one interaction has built-in opportunities for students to be known by those who are guiding their study.
- I wish I understood this question more clearly. It appears that you are focusing on the challenges of geographical distance. My CBTE program has fostered in-person meetings for non-residential students who lived in the same metro area, while also using regularly scheduled video calls - in cases of geographical proximity or distance. Regularity was a key to accountability.
- Protocols and practices are laid out in advance within the curriculum. The logic of these practices is communicated early and often to students. These practices are tracked as part of the evaluation process. Students are given the responsibility for many if not most of the teacher/mentor interactions.
- I have developed learning environments which are designed with students learning styles, more dialogue with students, and reflective learning. I have found timely feedback, whether verbal or written, to be an important part of CBTE.
- Input and feedback from both; relevant and practical on-boarding for both teacher/mentor and student; easy access to best-practice and tips; mentor team establish with student the expectations and goals at beginning of theological education journey.
- Creating accountability is a crucial aspect. Protocols that encourage this would include intentional relationship building. In my experience managing a CBTE program from the perspective of a partnering denomination, I have found that it is necessary to consistently remind mentors of the responsibilities as well as giving them tools for connection. I send out Starbucks cards and books on mentoring and I set up meetings with mentors to see how they are doing.
- I don't know how much of a "learning environment" you really need. The team simply needs a way to (1) see the knowledge, skill and character requirements for

each outcome, (2) record the student's learning plan to develop those proficiencies, (3) store the artifacts generated by the student as part of their learning plan so the entire mentor team can make comments, (4) a video conferencing tool for the team to meet with, and (5) a form for recording the team's evaluation of the student's master of the competency. These are very modest requirements, and can be satisfied with a collaborative document management system and a video call application.

- Assigning students a faculty mentor/advisor who is required to check in and making that relationship the center of working through competencies together in tandem.
- 1. Require these interactions as part of the program (our program requires a meeting 1x/month as a minimum with professor, and each mentor in a virtual format, i.e. zoom)
2. Summative assessments could be done in an interactive way (professor walks through the submitted assignment with student to highlight strengths and weaknesses)
3. Mentors and Professor meet all together at the end of the competency with the student (virtually) to point out strengths and areas for growth.”
- By establishing a mentor team with specific outcomes to establish the relationship and structure.
- The use of mentors (context-specific, personal and faculty) with intentional requirements of meetings with each individual and the team as a whole - both virtually (zoom) and in person when possible.
- Creating learning environments which encourage and support teacher/student interactions requires placing these interactions at the forefront of the educational model. Specifically: relationships become the medium through which education happens. Content is not "delivered;" rather, space for growth is created by the relationships. The metaphor of creating space is not entirely abstract; in my own practice I am thinking of the work of Paulo Freire and other critical pedagogy developers. For them, both teacher and student take a posture of learning and the goal of learning is to help the student develop his/her own understanding of self and context.

Question 2: How specifically, can a CBTE program develop practical protocols for creating learning environments which encourage and support spiritual formation across space through non-residential learning experiences in a competency-based structure?

- There is no substitute for time spent with a person for learning where they are at spiritually and developing customized plans for nurturing that person's faith formation.
- I have not seen the development of protocols for spiritual formation.

- We use three mentors, one of which mostly reflects on spiritual formation. All mentors should emphasize spiritual formation. But one mentor tracks this dimension as a major focus. Spiritual formation must also be included within the evaluation and/or assessment protocols. Thus, students learn how to assess themselves according to specific metrics on spiritual formation.
- I will again emphasize reflective learning as key to encourage spiritual formation in learning experiences. Spiritual formation must be acknowledged and integrated into all outcome and learning experiences as it addresses our formation and character.
- Personal mentor on 3-person mentor team is crucial;
- We require that our students read through the entire bible twice in their time in the program. This requirement serves a few purposes, the primary purpose being to help them establish a life long habit of being in the scripture for personal growth and enrichment beyond sermon prep. We look for vulnerable interaction in their online submissions, and when we feel that it is looking like a variation on a commentary we run interference and help them re-focus on their relationship with Christ personally as we want them to interact with the scripture to hear from God.
- I like to connect the student with spiritual formation resources and experiences in their local context. That way, they not only have easy access to those assets, but they begin to view their context as the primary arena where formation happens, rather than having to go off to some seminary classroom or retreat centre.
- Including spiritual formation in the competencies and ensuring that spiritual formation is addressed in relationship to faculty or other staff/mentors by including that as a part of the program.
- 1. Professor and mentors solicit specific prayer requests from student and actually spend time praying for God's work in the student's life (leaders need to recognize that spiritual growth is God's work and we participate in it by praying for the student)
2. In our program, we have 2 mentors that stay with the student throughout the program. These people are the ones who are in the student's life in a face to face sort of way and can walk with them in the ups and downs of development.
3. Assignments should have a formational element to them--not just be content driven, and not just ministry application driven. If a student is required to develop a sermon, include as part of the assignment a personal reflection piece where the student assesses his/her own life based on the implications of the biblical text.
- Creating specific outcomes that are assessed by a mentor team
- Same as above. Each mentor has strengths/areas of competency that will relate to the student's individual needs - including this one.

- Spiritual formation must be integrated into all aspects of the curriculum. At SFS we do have one outcome dedicated to spiritual formation; however, in order to develop well-rounded graduates, I encourage students to begin with this outcome and continue the practices throughout the program. Partially this comes through repeatedly asking, when the student encounters new ideas or experiences: "How does this affect your spiritual practice?" or: "how does your spiritual practice help you navigate these challenges?" This is some pushback against the traditional hard splits between categories of theological education since at least Schleiermacher. Rather than viewing spiritual formation as entirely separate from, say, biblical studies, I view my task as helping the student see the ways they intersect and overlap. Christians have always read and interpreted the Bible in spiritual communities, and our reading of the Bible has always shaped our spiritual practices. I therefore try to encourage this cyclical motion throughout the student's experience.

Question 3: How specifically, can a CBTE program develop strategies to facilitate the creation of positive student to student interactions in a non-residential, competency-based structure for spiritual formation?

- This is one of the challenges. SFS requires attendance at several gatherings where the focus is on dialogue and interaction between students. I have also recommended specific students connect with other specific students who are working in similar contexts.
- In my experience, student-to-student interactions have mostly happened during periodic in-person "intensives," that happen 2-3 times per year. In addition, when one mentor is assigned to mentor multiple students, some activities can be combined for small groups of students.
- Spiritual formation is primarily happening at home, church and work. Student to student interactions thus become mainly an opportunity - and a safe space - to reflect and share about these experiences. Part of any CBTE program is allow and encourage students to create a structure and environment for spiritual formation that can be replicated within a congregational environment. Models of spiritual formation cannot be unique experiments that only function within a "school environment." The spiritual practices within a CBTE program should set up habits and practices for a lifetime.
- Peer-to-peer has always been a significant strategy in learning. In adult learner models, the teaching mentor needs to encourage collegial learning since formation happens in community.
- Establish cohorts of students to meet on a regular basis around relevant outcome. My students asked for regular meetings with my group of students and were eager for me as the faculty mentor to organize opportunities to meet on a monthly or 6-week schedule. Clearly, they wanted this. I decide the topics for discussion based on what I

note are recurring questions. I did not want to put the time into this effort, though, until I had a enough students to make it worthwhile.

- You need to create interactions online and in person when possible that facilitate FUN. Trust is built in the context of vulnerable authentic relationship. Fostering this is crucial and I do not for a moment assume this will happen without facilitation on my end as the manager of the program. Intentions are fantastic....actual action is hard won. Today is a perfect example of how we do this. At the lunch break for their quarterly seminar, we will be supplying pizza and make sure they all know each other. We give away swag, I have them in my home for dinner at least once a year. We constantly remind them that they matter to us and that they need each other. We did try student-run cohorts, and some of these form naturally as students are in churches in the same region of the province but our random formations did not always take off. Every two months we host cohort calls online with them and these are successful. We kinda sorta make these as mandatory as possible.
- There isn't a lot of this in the CBE programs I've taught in. However, I am working with a Brazilian group who are starting up their own CBTE program and they want peer learning to be a big part of it (reflecting local cultural norms). Their plan is to group students into learning groups and have those groups move through the program together. In fact, this peer group functions as another member of the mentor team (i.e. instead of a Personal Mentor they students have Peer Mentors who do things as a collective). While this complicates the mastery learning part of CBTE (i.e. the students won't develop mastery at exactly the same pace), it is believed that the student-to-student interactions will more than make up for it.
- Building in intensives that are on site or smaller group components to the program utilizing video conference technology.
- This is probably the toughest aspect of CBTE.
Hub churches have the ability to create this by having multiple staff members going through the program.
Individual students could be partnered with another student for prayer and support (we don't do this, but it's an idea)
We've tried livestreamed events at a Hub church, where we have people physically in the room and then other students in virtual locations participating either live or with the recorded material at a later date with other students.
We've created Facebook-type groups of cohorts--but this is difficult because students move at different paces and no longer stay in the same content areas.
This is probably the area that needs the most work, in my opinion.
- Create a required fellowship/colleague group outcome that spans across cohorts and years of experience.
- The use of intentional student "cohort" meetings online, which are student-led is helpful in my experience.

- This one is more difficult for me to answer because I am not convinced my students are making these connections well. At SFS we have the gatherings and we have Houses, e.g. Wesley house. Still, the process for making connections with other students feels a bit arbitrary or willy-nilly.
I would connect my own students to each other; however, they are all in very different places and pursuing different vocational goals so I do not believe they would connect well. I wonder if, when we get Pathwright up and running, there would be a way to see which other students are working on a particular module or outcome, and provide a way for them to interact together. I could see that being a possible way to improve student interactions.

Question 4: How specifically, can a CBTE program develop strategies to facilitate the creation of positive teacher/mentor to student interactions in a non-residential, competency-based structure for spiritual formation?

- Consistent and intentional work on the part of the mentor toward the student is key. Without that, it's easy for the student to go with the tyranny of the urgent and forget about the educational pieces of their lives for long stretches of time.
- Some mentors already know their students. In my experience, 2 out of 3 mentors assigned to an individual student are likely to have prior relationship with the student. The other mentor has taken individual responsibility to build relationship with the student.
- Clear guidelines should be lifted up right from the beginning. For example, what expectations are realistic; which ones aren't realistic. This teacher/mentor relationship, for example, should not replace other primary relationships within the home or congregation. It's complementary in nature, not a substitution. Certain broad expectations should be covered in the relationship; for example: regular contact, prayer, Bible reading, fellowship, mutuality and the sharing of resources should be included in most if not all engagements. Regular assessment should also be included. Checking in regularly about "how is this working?" "What adjustments should we make?"
- Training teachers/mentors to facilitate interactions in spiritual formation needs to happen before developing strategies or the strategies will be less meaningful.
- mentor team establish with student the expectations and goals at beginning of theological education journey.
- Keep messaging the importance of this. We facilitate this by giving a gift card to each student in December to take their ministry mentor out for a meal. We ask the mentors how they are doing with this. Basically we remind them in a monthly Mentor Update that they need to be connecting with their student (s)

- A combination of training ahead of time on adult learning and coaching techniques and just-in-time instruction as the mentor works with their student. So both proactive preparation and reactive coaching.
- Building in intensives that are on site or smaller group components to the program utilizing video conference technology.
- Some of the answers above already addressed this.
I try to close each zoom meeting by praying for the student
I ask questions about how the material is changing their perspective, challenging their walk with the Lord, or being applied in their ministry venue.
- By establishing the mentor relationship through the faculty mentor, requiring the other mentors involved in assessment team
- Mentor team - same as above
- Training is important. The teacher/mentor needs to know the expectations for the program and have access to his/her own mentors and training materials. Having some confidence in one's own abilities to mentor goes a long way toward being comfortable in the role of mentor.

Question 5: How specifically, can a CBTE program develop strategies to facilitate the creation of positive student to teacher/mentor interactions in a non-residential, competency-based structure?

- Consistent and intentional work on the part of the mentor toward the student is key. Without that, it's easy for the student to go with the tyranny of the urgent and forget about the educational pieces of their lives for long stretches of time.
- Structures could encourage regularity/frequency of contact.
- Above, I've listed specific dimensions to any teacher/mentor situation. These guidelines should also include strategies. This is both important and difficult. Students should be able to articulate goals that they want to achieve within interactions. The very ability to reflect on, articulate and develop a plan to execute these strategies is, in fact, an important dimension of the spiritual formation process within a CBTE program. It will also be assessed.
- As I stated above, training teachers/mentors to facilitate interactions in spiritual formation needs to happen before developing strategies or the strategies will be less meaningful.
- Hire mentors who are committed and attuned to student-centered learning; co-creation of relevant learning activities; smooth and clear curriculum and progress process so that focus can be on learning rather than figuring out the system.

- Same as above
- Probably the same as above. The students clearly understand their part in the adult learning / coaching relationship before they begin, supplemented by further troubleshooting and reminders as needed along the way. While the academic mentor may provide the just-in-time coaching, it may be useful to have a third party who is not part of the mentor team be available for this (in case the academic mentor is the problem).
- Building in intensives that are on site or smaller group components to the program utilizing video conference technology. Still, at the center should be faculty-student regular connection.
- Use of virtual/online platforms like zoom--require this on a monthly basis
Reach out by email to touch base with students to provide a devotional thought, or to acknowledge their effort in pursuing theological education, show empathy when they are being bombarded with challenges, help them to know that we were students at one point, too, and can appreciate the pressure cooker they are in if they are juggling a lot of heavy responsibilities.
- Same as above
- Not sure this is a different question - except for the addition of "for spiritual formation" above
- It is important that the students know and understand that they need to advocate for themselves and that their education is a team effort between themselves and the mentors. Education in a CBTE model is not passive--it requires active participation from start to finish.
At the same time, however, early interactions with administrators must prepare students to be challenged and pushed. Some students enter the program with the expectation that all of their beliefs will simply be confirmed; while this is an important part of education, it is also important to push beyond what one already knows for the purpose of growth. Therefore, early interactions can help prepare the student for the active role they will be taking--which is very different from the (relative) passivity they were likely used to in prior education settings.

Question 6: How specifically, can a CBTE program develop learning experiences or assignments related to spiritual formation for non-residency, competency-based students to be involved in as active participants in projects, presentations, and other activities?

- You start from the student's context and work backward toward the learning objectives. You must find out what mastery looks like for their context first.

- In my experience, students in our CBTE program are positioned as active participants in every way. If they don't take initiative and responsibility in projects, presentations, and other activities, then no progress is made at all.
- In our program, spiritual formation is a key "outcome" that is assessed. Therefore students must put together multiple assignments to achieve these competencies. Although formal classes may play a role here, more creative assignments are usually most beneficial. Since all of our students are involved within congregational ministries, the congregation provides a rich environment for learning experiences. Prayer groups, staff development, children's ministries, seniors' ministries, etc. all can be identified as places where "assignments" and projects can be developed. The key is that the assignments are real projects with real people or groups in need. Outside resources are added to bring substance. The projects themselves should be wrapped in prayer. Finally, we like at least one assignment to revolve around the home and spiritual formation, and not just have these projects limited to the church. Students develop these projects in conversation with their three mentors; a faculty mentor, a pastoral mentor and a personal mentor. The mentors, in dialogue with students, develop these assignments.
- Begin by not talking about assignments or activities. Spiritual formation is a relational process of time, space and light. Spiritual formation needs to be steeped in a meaningful mentoring relationship.
- Suggested and lots of room for student generated ideas with mentor guidance.
- Allow for creativity. I think that often in a CBTE program we unwittingly put up barriers when it comes to how assignments are to be done. This kind of education requires out of the box thinking and the willingness to take risks. I find it very helpful to ask the student how they think an activity will help them develop competency. We are always looking at assignments through the lens of helping people in their spiritual journey. There is great value in pushing students to develop projects and presentations that can easily translate into practical application in their ministry context. We never do a project or create a presentation for the sole purpose of completing an assignment. We always make them ask WHY. before we get into the HOW
- I find it important to identify the student's growing edge in the area of spiritual formation. After preparing a spiritual autobiography and reading a good introductory textbook, you can prepare a customized learning plan that will scratch where the student is itching. However, you do need that initial survey to put enough pieces on the table so you can then know where that growing edge is.
- The use of spiritual formation groups and requiring spiritual mentors.
- One of the main differences between residential and CBTE is that assignments need to be designed for students to use IN their ministry (not in the classroom). Therefore,

they don't do a presentation to the class, they do a presentation with the people they serve in the ministry. They don't just write a paper, they present their research in a way that others can benefit from it: i.e. develop a workbook, deliver their testimony to a group, write 4 blogs on a topic that they researched, or use the theoretical information to analyze a case study and provide recommendations for ministry.

- Assign readings in the specific outcomes dealing with the topic. To be clear, no one develops spiritually beyond their baptism because you don't have a free will in the matter of salvation.
- Mentor team - same as above. The mentor team gets to know each student and thus what areas each student would like to/needs to strengthen.
- A big part of this comes from the creativity of the mentor teams. How we interpret competency matters, and the relative importance we place on these skills matters. The most important thing, then, is for the mentors to intentionally encourage projects and presentations as ways to demonstrate competency.
A second way would be to make space for student presentations at the Gatherings. Right now that is mostly limited to case study presentation, but in the future I believe further options could be explored--even if we use short-form presentation styles such as pecha kucha.

Question 7: How specifically, can CBTE programs develop methods for educators to assess spiritual formation in a non-residential, competency-based learning environment?

- Regular and expected zoom meetings with other faculty mentors has been key to discuss ideas and develop strategies for success.
- Assessing spiritual formation is difficult in any educational format, CBTE or otherwise. It seems important to me that mentors maintain a robust relationship with their students in order to assess their growth as holistically and realistically as possible.
- All of our assessment protocols are carried out by three mentors: a faculty, pastoral and personal mentor. Academic, professional and personal dynamics are built into each level of assessment. All three mentors must approve all major assignments. This multiple dimensional approach to assessment assures a well-rounded review of each outcome designated by the program.
- The spiritual disciplines offer us the examen as an "assessment." Scripture invites us to reflect on the "fruits of the Spirit." I cannot give a recommendation for an educator to "assess" spiritual formation unless it is purely an academic study. Then we have ways to measure and assess content. Otherwise, how do we measure one's prayer life? Or measure the sins of another? We CAN develop methods to walk with another for the sake of being image bearers rather than evaluators.

- Rubric for assessment; common understanding of spiritual formation
- We are just put together a list of performance indicators that are now a part of the grading /assessing process for the mentors. We are so excited about the consistency that these indicators bring to the assessment process. We have broken down each competency into 5 key things that we are looking for and then we have given the mentors a specific statement that helps them gauge mastery. Things like: The student has demonstrated effective interpersonal skills as he or she has led a 6-8 week bible study that was well received by the participants.
They are more exact than this but I am just typing this without looking back at what we created. Basically, wherever possible we have lessened subjectivity and released objectivity.
- I like to use a combination of indirect measures - how much intentionality is the student bringing to the spiritual formation process and its disciplines - and direct measures - actual progress made in spiritual maturity (such as the Christian Life Profile). Neither of these measures is perfect, but together they paint a picture of progress or stagnation.
- Training and digital resources to make these connections easier.
- 1. Assignments that require the student to integrate material into their personal life are essential.
2. A foundational understanding that seminary is a safe place for the student to identify their struggles, weaknesses, and incompetence in certain character and theoretical disciplines is also essential. (Professors and mentors need to model this and clarify that this is not a time to fake it till you make it--but seminary is a great time to uncover your potential landmines and do the hard work of being changed from the inside out. Our first competency deals with specifically with this, and provides a foundation for the student to grow in self-awareness, as they also grow in knowledge of God).
3. People who are in the student's life need to contribute to the holistic understanding of the student (point out blind spots). A distant professor knows very little of the student's day to day life. The ministry supervisor and the formation mentor who are meeting with the student and seeing them in action can speak into their lives and provide a safe space to wrestle with who they are becoming, not just the assignments that they are submitting. We had a case where I, as the professor, was ready to sign off on a student's progress, but the mentor was not ready, because he saw some character issues (related to the competency) that were not on a level of maturity for a spiritual leader. His insights helped us form a new benchmark for the student to achieve so that the program addressed this detrimental flaw that I couldn't see in his summative assignment work. The student was not trying to hide anything, it was truly a blind spot that he could not see in his life.
4. Beyond the mentors' role, assignments can be developed that allow others to give the student feedback--surveys, interviews, and requirements to solicit evaluation from their faith community.”

- Preaching to your students to elect them with the Word of God and remove their imagined free will is essential.
- Spiritual formation is not something that can be assessed. We are formed, passively, in our baptism and never progress beyond that; thus, there is nothing to assess.
- Spiritual formation is notoriously difficult to assess given its resistance to quantification. Of course there are survey tools and the like that we can use, but assessment in this area is driven by relationship and self-assessment. Learning how to assess one's own spiritual health, I believe, is a skill in itself and shows a certain maturity on the part of the individual. That is: as a student progresses in terms of spiritual formation, they become better able to articulate their own growth in this area. Assessment is therefore based on growth and reflection.

Question 8: What are other specific areas that do not fit any of the general categories already listed above that you deem necessary for spiritual formation in CBTE? Please give examples and explain why you feel they need to be included.

- I struggled with your questions. I'm not sure they are clear enough to get at the information you're seeking.
- I would want to explore a student's rootedness in a local church - a Christ-centered community where they build relationships and use and develop their gifts in ministry.
- Be flexible. Adapt to the student's needs. Spiritual formation is a part of the curriculum but it's also about relationships. This dimension of the curriculum should create a desire to grow, not just a need to "pass."
- I do not have any additional information to add at this time.
- The faculty mentor the mentor team must be skilled to listen to God's spirit regarding the student; Faculty mentor must establish with the mentor team a culture of the importance and regular attention to spiritual formation and not hesitate to address it.
- There needs to be a constant push towards greater self-awareness .We do this through EQ Bootcamp, Birkman Method Testing as well as generally requiring the students to understand, embrace and push forward in our collective mandate to be on mission in regard to the gospel. We insist that our student be accountable to our gospel mandate and live this out in the sphere of influence God has given them.
- One area that doesn't get much attention in spiritual formation training is spiritual pathologies, or common ways in which Christians can get stuck in their spiritual lives. Historically there has been a great deal of literature written on this topic, but somehow most spiritual formation literature today skips over this.

- Building spiritual formation into program introduction could be a great help.
- Faculty development--specific training needs to be developed so that professors and mentors understand the huge paradigm shift and can participate strategically in the discipleship process.
- The faulty assumption is that spiritual formation is something that happens outside of the direct event of hearing the Word of God. So all outcomes in spiritual formation must include a direct proclamation of the Word in the ear of the student (faith comes through hearing).
- The areas I would include in spiritual formation are preaching, Biblical studies and exegesis, understanding the role and proper administration of the sacraments
- I believe that interaction across lines of difference is important for spiritual formation and can be more difficult in CBTE, particularly when it is done online. For example, in both my master's and doctoral programs, which were traditional and on campus, I encountered fellow students from a wide variety of backgrounds, ethnicities, and spiritual traditions. The relationships I developed with these colleagues were an invaluable part of my own theological education as I gained an appreciation for them and their traditions and was asked to share about my own. For many of my students, however, these interactions only happen somewhat superficially (or at least briefly) during Kairos gatherings. I do not know a best practice in this area yet, but I do know that such experiences both increase our compassion and help us think more critically about our own traditions

APPENDIX 6

ROUND 2 RATIONAL FOR REMAINING OUTSIDE OF CONSENSUS

Statement: Design CBTE spiritual formation curricula around engagement with Scripture

Panel Consensus Response: Very Important

Non-Consensus Response: Extremely Important

I wrestled with this question because I would prefer the student/mentor team choose to engage with Scripture, yet the reality is that many students start seminary with minimal integration of Scripture into their lives and need to be introduced, or taught how to integrate Scripture and spiritual disciplines into their lives. We are pretty good at resourcing various Christian books, but I have yet to experience too many students steeped in Scripture. Just naming a reality, not a judgement.

I do not desire to alter my answer. I chose "extremely important" because knowledge of God and knowledge of self are foundational components to formation and growth. Our distorted perceptions of reality in these areas need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:1-2). Scripture is the basis for this renewal, for without it we have blindspots and gaps in our understanding. It is the only way we can get out of our subjectivity and allow ultimate reality to shape us. Hope this helps to give a rationale for my answer.

Statement: Students are active participants in the ministry of a local faith community

Panel Consensus Response: Extremely Important

Non-Consensus Response: Very Important

Not all students can be active participants in the ministry of a local community of faith. For example, they may have just moved or are for some other reason new to a church - or even between churches. It is clearly preferable that the student be involved in ministry, but I hesitate to say Extremely Important. If it was extremely important, then we would have to turn these students away (or suspend their program if they've already started) until they are so engaged.

Statement: Students are active participants in the ministry of a local faith community

Panel Consensus Response: Extremely Important

Non-Consensus Response: Somewhat Important

I do not want to alter my response to this question. The question identifier of "local faith community" is what influenced my answer. If a student, for example, is a chaplain at a long-term care center that requires the student to lead the worship services on Sunday several times a month, they often cannot be part of a local faith community. Now, if one were to define the long-term care center as a local faith community, even then my answer would stay "somewhat." I also have students who are leaders of secular and faith-based non-profits who are not part of a local faith community for a variety of reasons. They are, however, very well and regularly connected with other Christians. Whether or not we call that group a "local faith community" is in question. Finally, in my time living and ministering abroad, I was not part of a local faith community. There wasn't one. Still, I communed with other Christians on a regular basis and those people were from across the globe.

Statement: Utilize digital technology (e.g., video conferencing) for regular mentor-to-student synchronous interaction

Panel Consensus Response: Extremely Important

Non-Consensus Response: Very Important

First, I found it tempting to click "extremely important" to many of the questions. But that defeats the point. You can't make everything "extremely important." I judged this point to be "very important." The difference is minimal. My students at present connect with their mentors at least every couple of months. I find this kind of contact to be "very important." Again, the difference here is minimal.

Statement: Students take personal responsibility for the forward progress of their CBTE program

Panel Consensus Response: Extremely Important

Non-Consensus Response: Very Important

Second, concerning "personal responsibility," again the difference is minimal. Of course, students need to take personal responsibility. Nevertheless, the mentors also accept some responsibility. It's not the sole responsibility of the student. If it were the student's sole responsibility, I would have clicked "extremely important." Again, this is a difference without too much distinction.

I hope this is helpful. I believe the instructions should have pointed to some distinction between "extremely" and "very." You can't make everything "extremely" and still maintain distinctions of responsibility within a program. Where is responsibility shared with mentors, when is it "extremely" dependent upon the students.

APPENDIX 7

ROUND 3 RATIONAL FOR REMAINING OUTSIDE OF CONSENSUS

Statement: Assignments reinforce the student's context (work, home, faith community) as the primary place where spiritual formation occurs

Panel Consensus Response: Agree

Non-Consensus Response: Disagree

Research and my experience with students engaged in formal theological education do not necessarily learn best for all assignments in the students' contexts for all topics. For the Kairos project, for example, Outcome 3 seeks to encourage and even push students out of their context as a way to increase their ethnohermeneutic learning and their intercultural competency development. Literature supports that learning for these outcomes are best learned "out of our comfort zone" or context of familiar work, home and faith community.

I actually find this consensus concerning. It suggests an ethnocentric mindset. Jesus' gospel message is that redemption is for all people, all nations. The US demographics are also shifting. If ministry leaders want to remain relevant, they need this learning that is likely out of a homogeneous context. Thus, theological education must include as a central focus of its education to develop the mind, skills and heart to minister outside of a student's context.

Statement: Students receive a team in which all members are concerned in-part with spiritual formation on some level, regardless of the mentor's specific area of responsibility

Panel Consensus Response: Agree

Non-Consensus Response: Disagree

It would depend on the size of the mentor team. I work in a context where every student has a team of 3 mentors. If one of those mentors were chosen for some other expertise and they were not very concerned with the student's spiritual formation, I think that would still be ok, as long as the other two carried that weight. But I suppose it would be generally unhelpful if one or more mentors were somehow suspicious about or antagonistic toward spiritual formation.

Statement: Mentors communicate consistently and intentionally with the student for the purpose of creating a context for the student's spiritual formation

Panel Consensus Response: Agree

Non-Consensus Response: Disagree

I'd rather foster an environment where the student takes greater responsibility for themselves. I don't want to model too much dependence on the initiative of others.

Statement: Learning outcomes are customized to a student's personal or ecclesial context

Panel Consensus Response: Agree

Non-Consensus Response: Disagree

I would think that the learning outcomes would tend to be pretty stable from one context to another, while the means of creating or demonstrating those outcomes would be highly customizable to the context.

Statement: Mentors utilize student-centered design for spiritual formation CBTE curricula

Panel Consensus Response: Agree

Non-Consensus Response: Disagree

My disagreement here may have to do with the interpretation of "student-centered design." I react negatively to that term analogously to how I would react to child-centered parenting. I think that's too unstable. It puts too much burden on the individual. If I were going to "center" something, it would be outcome-centered, or maybe even tradition-centered. I do, however, think that the design of the program should take the individual into account. It should take into account their present development, their personality, their relationships, their learning style, etc. I don't think I would choose to call that "student-centered," but if that's what you meant by student-centered, then I could agree with that.

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ABSTRACT

SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN THE CONTEXT OF SEMINARY-LEVEL DISTANCE COMPETENCY- BASED THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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The seminary endeavor has transitioned from a primarily residential full-time undertaking to a project assumed by individuals in a multiplicity of life-stages and in less traditional and less-residency-oriented formats. The burgeoning modality of competency-based theological education (CBTE) may offer an alternate approach to traditional face-to-face or online-model seminary training. This thesis aims, through a mixed methods study, to consider possible best practices in the area of spiritual formation in the context of seminary-level competency-based theological education. This study examines best practices at the three seminaries with established CBTE programs in the Association of Theological Schools.

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