

Book Review: *New Paradigm in Ministry Education*

Title: *The New Paradigm in Ministry Education*

Publisher: The Victoria Press (South Bend, IN, 2008)

Author: Dr. John H. Morgan

After reading John H. Morgan's, *The New Paradigm in Ministry Education*, I recalled an episode from when I was fifteen years old, and once stranded at the Toronto International Airport. Bored by the long delay between flights, I decided to engage some fellow travelers in conversation. The lady who sat next to me in the waiting room seemed interesting. We chatted amiably. Just before our departure, I asked her: "And what is your line of work?" Smiling, she replied: "I am a specialist facilitator of interpersonal intimacy." Observing my look of bewilderment, she quickly clarified: "Oh, you sweet dumb thing, it means that I 'work' in a brothel, as a hooker!" Embarrassed, I responded: "Thank you. But I really wouldn't have been uncomfortable if you had simply said that in the first place." We laughed, and went our separate ways.

The six chapters of *The New Paradigm* probe beneath the veneer which camouflages so much of what academic institutions often try to persuade the public is their pristine and unblemished identity. The myth far outstretches the reality in many instances, with the unadorned truth being seldom evident "in the first place." Dr. Morgan's central thesis is that while those conventional educational institutions may still be entitled to their legitimacy, notably where undergraduates are concerned, those seeking a terminal degree as ministry professionals have needs and expectations which require a profound reevaluation of the familiar models. For the most part, those models no longer suffice.

The New Paradigm proposes, exactly as its subtitle states, to offer an alternative educational vision for that professional; one based upon "a radical philosophy of collaboration." Given the more than two decades of my service as a university professor and administrator, I believe that the book admirably

achieves that aim. It represents more than a justification for the unique approach of the Graduate Theological Foundation (Indiana) and where Dr. Morgan has been President since 1982. What the book provides is a credible, practical, systematic and balanced defense of the inherent value of the ministry professional's accrued training and experience. Dr. Morgan advocates that that kind of record should permit the degree candidate a much greater direct involvement in designing and determining their 'terminal degree' program than is normally thought reasonable or acceptable. *The New Paradigm* is the only 'apologia' of which I am aware that has the courage to assert that an academic venue properly exists for the sake of the student and not vice versa as we are conditioned to presume is the only valid norm. It is not.

There is a prevalent view that the pursuit of University studies is a case of 'one size fits all'. In Chapter One, "The Problem," this misconception is addressed candidly. The typical "pro forma agenda" tends actually to be geared to the "symbols" associated with the image of academic respectability in the public eye. It is a milieu which often lacks even minimal awareness of what pertains to "the seasoned post-credentialed advance-degree professional." The preference is to expend institutional energies in the cultivation of a "beautiful campus", a well-stacked library, and a faculty renowned more for its publication record than for its passion to 'profess'. Dr. Morgan refers to this as a "cookie-cutter mentality," and which is as wasteful as it is absurd. Rather, the learning process ought to be "consumer-driven." I concur. I have been associated with universities where students seldom crossed the portals of their mega-library system (opting instead for internet-based research) and where the governing boards clamored to erect the most modern of sportsplex (usually poorly attended); pouring scads of money into mediocre athletic teams and leaving classroom facilities in nearly a decrepit state. Meanwhile, the Professors 'of record' seldom encountered those enrolled in their courses. They were substituted by Graduate student-interns. Of course, tuition rates soared. Dr. Morgan properly refutes such an exaggerated and costly façade.

Chapter Two (“The Old Solutions”) stresses the futility of handling “the same problems in the same manner with the same resources.” For example, “compressed teaching by depressed faculty” is hardly a viable answer. Nor should a doctoral curriculum be a mere enlargement of “a bachelor’s program.” Sheer common sense suggests the wisdom of “having a faculty that serves as ‘consulting colleagues’ to the professional student,” minus the absolutism of “demanding compliance with pre-set requirements.”

“The New Solution” (Chapter Three) regards the “student as client rather than servant.” It rejects the notions of learning contexts being “entirely self-contained” and the faculty being essentially “omniscient.” Such “imperialistic subjugation” must concede before the “radical paradigm (...) of genuine multi-institutional collaboration.” That paradigm promotes a broad educational portfolio from which the student has the “liberty” to select what best befits their career goals. The responsibility of the host institution thereby consists of “assessing objectively and fairly” the “integrity and credibility” of those institutions with which it is in formal relationship. The potential benefit for the student always remains of paramount importance. And the “professional veteran” has the right to expect that they will be “learning something new and helpful in (their) profession” (cf. Chapter Four, “Shifting a Paradigm in a Time of Transition”). In the “face of advancing technologies and global consciousness” we can no longer equate “physical books with education.” As Dr. Morgan asserts: “Information is the key, not the medium in which it is found.” Therefore, the student must be encouraged to “take the lead in identifying the places of learning” and where those are “not limited to a single campus or a single faculty.”

The Graduate Theological Foundation applies the model proposed in the previous sixty pages. Over 2000 persons have completed doctoral studies with GTF since its inception 46 years ago. Some 375-400 students comprise the annual enrollment, of whom 40% are women and 15% are non-U.S. citizens.

Chapter Five details the five “levels of inter-institutional affiliation” available to them, including; Partnering Resources in Ministry Education (P.R.I.M.E.), those which are Recognized and Endorsed (R&E) and Approved Venue Sites (AVS). These maintain their “own self-imposed standards” to which “Foundation students must subscribe.” But the range of course options is as extensive as those options are flexible and diverse. However, this does not mean that the Foundation sets a low-bar for its admission, quite the contrary. Masters Degrees necessitate a bona fide undergraduate degree plus five years of ministerial experience. Professional doctorates similarly require five years experience (plus a bachelors and Masters degree) as do the academic doctorates (acceptance additionally entails a professional doctorate). Overall costs are thus but a fraction of what is exacted on traditional campuses. Indeed, the Foundation is willing to further aid the student by offering them an interest-free loan. And the faculty’s actual role in this “paradigm”? It is to maximize access by students. Besides numerous Tutorials and Independent Study opportunities, the faculty is committed to “the planning and development of new degree programs,” the evaluation “of written work” (part of each educational venue) and “the supervision of theses and dissertations.” Naturally, “the comfort level runs high” at the Foundation since its core thrust is empowerment. GTF’s undergraduate division (Cloverdale College) ensures that those “without a bachelor’s degree” are not excluded, but may select from a “Bachelor of Religious Education, Theology, Sacred Music, Mediation, Islamic Studies and Fine Arts.”

The concluding Chapter (Six) treats the contentious issue of accreditation. I have heard objections to GTF framed as; “but the Foundation only has State Approval from Indiana, and so it should be ignored.” This deduction is misleading. Why? Because, for example, the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges does not accredit where there is no “circulation library” or a “residential faculty.” And the Association of Theological Schools does not accredit institutions that are “ecumenical and non-creedal” in their mission. Perhaps the time has come when GTF’s next initiative might be to devise a new

and “radical philosophy” of accreditation. There are many, like myself, who are confident that the Foundation is blessed by the prophetic insight sufficient to succeed ...‘in the first place’.

Reviewer: Rev. Dr. Bernard J. O’Connor, Official, Vatican’s Congregation for Eastern Churches