

FORMATION AS EDUCATION: BERKELEY DIVINITY SCHOOL AT YALE

BERKELEY DIVINITY SCHOOL AT YALE is a seminary where the cultivation of what has been called “the pastoral imagination” is at the core of our vision of theological education. This integrative concept leads us to understand each of the elements of a student’s experience – study, worship, prayer, and community life – to have its own educational value and importance. This is not to say that we do not continue to debate the appropriate relationship of the various elements of classroom study and spiritual life, academic rigor and pastoral care, and the theory and practice of ministry. But contrary to the rather artificial perspective that tends to divide these elements into opposing and even contradictory activities, here there is a deliberate intentionality that sees formation for ministry as the product of the whole of the Seminary’s educational life.

The idea of theological education as the cultivation of “the pastoral imagination” comes from Craig Dykstra, vice president for religion at the Lilly Foundation. Dykstra means by it that sum total of skills and capacities that enables a pastor to understand the world in relation to God, and to bring the gospel message to bear on the world. What undergirds such an ability, he says, is a clarity of mind that allows for a penetrating engagement with the whole range of disciplines and intelligences from which a pastor must draw in order to bring God and world together.

Professor emeritus David Kelsey has perhaps given the clearest articulation of the way in which such an integrative ideal shapes the prevailing educational philosophy at YDS. In a piece that appeared in *The Christian Century* several years ago, he argued that the overarching goal of everything that is done at a theological school should be “more clearly to understand God and to understand everything in relation to God.” In pursuing this goal, students and faculty together engage in a variety of practices that contribute to its accomplishment in diverse ways, but which have at their core this common purpose. The manner in which Berkeley/Yale students are formed, in other words, is shaped by the cumulative experience of engagement in the complex and intricately related experiences of classroom study, chapel worship, practical experience, individual prayer, and community activity.



I believe that the location of Berkeley Divinity School at Yale University offers the most intellectually and spiritually fecund environment in the Episcopal Church for the cultivation of “the pastoral imagination.” If education is understood in the classical sense of *paideia*, which describes a form of

teaching that cultivates the virtues and character necessary for the successful accomplishment of a life’s goal, then the particular combination of practices that characterizes study at Berkeley/Yale Divinity Schools is ideally suited to the formation of individuals who have learned how to think both about God and the world, and who know how to shape the community life of the church in light of that knowledge. Thus, it is not by happenstance that Berkeley finds itself in its university setting, but rather it is located here by reason of a calculated intention to engage in formation as education, in the fullest sense of that term.

The Episcopal Church needs what Berkeley can provide: clergy and lay leaders who have developed the capacity for leadership that is born out of an educational environment that focuses on the integration of the entire human being into the patterns and practices of a communal knowing and loving of God. Because of the strength of its faculty, the collaborative nature of its relationship to Yale, and the increased focus of its Anglican Studies Program, Berkeley has never been in a stronger position to make advantage on behalf of the Church of the opportunities given by its being an Episcopal seminary embedded in a university divinity school, nor has it been more ready to meet the educational challenges implied thereby.

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