

[c. 2006 document]

When I finished writing these comments for the online alumni survey, it was too long. Yet, I don't want to shorten it. Kindly send it on to accompany my submitted survey. Thanks!

Please let me ramble a bit.

A 1963 alumnus, I was assistant academic dean and lecturer in philosophy of religion and education at the outset of the horrific years of seminary redirection in the late 1960s, early 70s. I knew that my position would fold, so I exited ASAP. Since that time, the Seminary seems to have experimented with various offerings, and there have always been fine faculty members participating - seemingly each "doing his/her own thing." I can't back this up with data, but I have the impression that the seminary has little overall curriculum stability, a lacking of "continuing wholeness."

Occasionally, there seems to have been some "soft" offerings, whether as courses or workshops. By "soft," I mean the type of course that dwells on the "how do you feel about that today?" rather than "what are your thoughts about the issue you have researched, and how would you support your conclusions?" Touchy-feely stuff, or what appears to be that, needs to be looked at.

There have always been broad statements about the Seminary's mission, but perhaps so broadly conceived that almost anything could fit as an offering or activity.

Years ago I suggested a symposium on prayer - which tends to function at a peasant, feel-good level among faith communities. *WHY* pray for peace, when it is human responsibility to exercise God-given freedom to bring about, or be on the road to, peace? *WHY* intercessory prayer - beyond the psychological effects of communal love and concern? *WHY* pray when there is a natural disaster - other than for mutual support - and is *THAT* by itself prayer? If such prayer is for beneficial feelings alone, why is this called "prayer?" What about "Christian" Yoga? Isn't that an insult to the more sophisticated Hindu practice of yoga? Imagine if we Christians went to India and read of "Eucharistic" whatevers? Does the "Wholly Other" render obsolete prayer to the personal, biblical God? In our awesome reverence for God, has the biblical God been depersonalized? Why do we keep praying "This *IS* my body; this *IS* my blood" in an "isness" sense, when in Aramaic Jesus would have conveyed an "is" in some sense of activity/action rather than "isness?"

There are so many theological and ethical issues related to the practice of ministry that seem to be internationally neglected or touched on lightly that a rich continuing education program, degree or not, could be developed in a meaty, perhaps revolutionary, way.

Now living in a theological desert of Florida's "Gold Coast," I would welcome within the Seminary website a series from major curricular areas - not technical stuff suitable only for AAR meetings, but updates in subject areas of theological studies and, more broadly, religious studies. What's going on that would affect me and the ministry I exercise (as retired priest-in-residence" at an Episcopal Church and a chaplain to Integrity-Palm Beach)?

Well there we are. Hartford Seminary was pivotal in my life. When admitted, I had left the (former) Berkeley Divinity School in disgust after competing one academic year, dropped preparation for Episcopal Church ordination, and studied with a splendid faculty in the HSF B.D. curriculum. I studied Islam with Dr. Elmer Douglas, sociology with Peter Berger, psychology with Walter Clark, "Quaker Old Testament" with Moses Bailey, history with Robert Paul, William Bradley in philosophy and ethics, George Riggan in theology, and so on. By some degree of osmosis rather than the classroom, I developed insights about the New Testament from Harvey MacArthur; unfortunately, a novice New Testament professor was pretty awful and stayed for a short time. When I reentered the Episcopal ordination track,

**the Seminary provided me with tutorials for my Diocese of Massachusetts canonical exams, which I passed well; I was ordained. (That I had a male partner all this time was well hidden.) In some ways I was naked and Hartford Seminary took me in, fed me, and helped launch me into ordained ministry.**

**Were I still in CT, retired, would I continue to learn at Hartford Seminary? Health permitting, probably so. But, I suspect I'd still be wondering, beyond the broad statements, where will this place be in ten years; what will it be offering - another new direction?**

**Regards,  
Dick Nolan**

**P.S. Take a look ----  
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[www.philosophy-religion.org](http://www.philosophy-religion.org)  
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