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## Toward a Spirit-empowered Framework for Encouraging Intellectual Conversions in Doctoral Students

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# TOWARD A

Spirit-empowered Framework for Encouraging  
Intellectual Conversions in Doctoral Students

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**Key Words** *intellectual conversion, five-fold gospel, Spirit-empowered movement, research, information literacy, graduate theological education*

## Abstract

This article demonstrates how the five-fold gospel paradigm in Pentecostal theology can provide Spirit-empowered graduate theology students with a framework for understanding key growth moments (or intellectual conversions) in the transformational learning process that takes place in scholarly research. This five-fold paradigm utilizes the spiritual transformation concepts of conversion, sanctification, empowerment, healing, and hope correspond to intellectual conversion moments in the lives of students who are changed by their research. These five key moments can be seen as a transformational tool that allows students to be intellectually transformed by the research process.

## Introduction

**A**t Oral Roberts University (ORU), I serve as the faculty theological librarian who teaches the research methods classes for the Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) programs. My primary role in these classes is to help the students develop a topic to research, do a thorough scholarly literature review

of the field, and to craft a research proposal that will guide them along their journey to the dissertation or research project. In this process, I am not only a librarian that assists in developing informational literacy skills for researching their topic, but I also mentor them in gaining the critical skills needed to form their expertise in the field.

All doctoral students embark on a journey of intellectual growth that advances their critical understanding of their field. To be successful, students must move beyond the basic proficiency of knowledge and writing that comes in bachelors and the mastery of a field in the master's degree, to entering into mature and advanced critical understandings of the scholarly conversations at the doctoral level. Doctoral students must not only expose themselves to a large body of literature in the field of their desired expertise, but they must also grow intellectually and take a more critical disposition to the knowledge they gain and the methodologies through which these ideas are explored.

Unfortunately, many students come into doctoral programs not having developed the critical faculties in research that would make them successful. Farooq & Maher (2021) note it's inaccurate to assume that graduate students have the skills in research they need when entering the program. The students I teach in research methods have a wide range of exposure and experience in research and information literacy due to the growing variety of formats in theological master's programs that exist in today's higher education market. Therefore, bibliographic assignments and literature reviews expose the students (some for the first time) to the scholarly conversations in the field of their study that begin the process of building their knowledge and expertise (Boote & Beile, 2005). As students walk through this process, there are many moments when students are confronted with concepts and theories in their field that challenge assumptions about their own knowledge and understanding of their area of research. It is here that the true beginning of learning on the doctoral level begins.

As a Spirit-empowered University, our constituency is largely part of the Pentecostal-Charismatic, or what we call the Spirit-empowered movement. Dayton (1987) establishes that the theological orientation that propels this movement is the five-fold theological emphasis of Jesus as savior, sanctifier, Spirit-baptizer, healer, and coming king. This

five-fold or “full gospel” emphasis represents for Amos Yong (2014), “the constellation of early modern Pentecostal beliefs and practices” that together “set Pentecostalism apart as a distinct expression of Christian faith” (p. 15). These tenets are more than doctrines; they represent significant experiences of the Holy Spirit in the *ordo salutis* of a believer’s faith journey. The familiarity of vernacular in the five-fold theological paradigm is an important tool I have used in guiding students through key movements in the research process. This five-fold paradigm provides students a Spirit-empowered framework for key growth moments (or intellectual conversions) in the transformational learning process that takes place in scholarly research.

## Research and Intellectual Conflict

Education is a process of both intellectual and personal growth. The rigors of doctoral education should facilitate critical information literacy education that evaluates, assesses, and situates information within the scope of the field of study. Florence (2014) shows that critical thinking has long been one of the educational outcomes for theological education encouraged by American Theological Schools (ATS) accreditors. According to Phillips (2014), critical thinking involves developing the ability to comprehend and evaluate arguments, an openness to the new ideas of the argument, and willingness to be persuaded by an argument if sufficient evidence and data are provided. These critical judgements about information and ideas are critical to the process of shaping a learner’s knowledge of their topic. But not all students are ready to do this sort of deeper level evaluation. Unfortunately, sometimes theological students perceive research as the process to find sources that reinforce a preconditioned attitude toward an idea, rather than challenge it.

Critical research challenges doctoral students to go deeper into the depth of understandings of scholarly conversation. At the same time, this process is re-shaping the researcher in their own self-understanding of the world and their own self. This process can be painful as deeply held assumptions are challenged. I have witnessed firsthand the crisis of wrestling with this internal conflict in my doctoral students. It is

this reality to which the concept of the five-fold gospel can assist by exploring how transformational research is much like the familiar Spirit-empowered crisis moments.

## **A Five-Fold Paradigm for Intellectual Conversions**

In Bernard Lonergan's classic *Method in Theology*, he sets out a process by which theological research is conducted. In his dialectical method, Lonergan (2000) notes that all formulations of research encounter moments of conflict when the researcher encounters evidence, data, or ideas that challenge the researcher's assumptions. These crisis moments require personal intellectual growth to let go of the previously held assumptions or biases in order to honestly assess and assimilate this knowledge. The key factor that creates this conflict is the researcher's horizon, or hermeneutical starting point. Lonergan notes that a person's horizons consist of the limited field of vision that is bound by social location and epistemological assumptions of the world that are sociologically and psychologically inherited.

The problem is that often a student's horizons are unknown to them; they are assumed realities that are often unquestioned. Jack Mezirow (1991) breaks these assumptions into three areas: content knowledge based on perception, process knowledge based on how one comes to conclusions, and premise knowledge, the actual awareness of convictions for why one believes this way. There can be many areas where unchallenged assumptions come into play in the research process including their level of comprehension of topic, the nature of the problem or phenomenon that needs to be addressed, and the potential solutions. If any of these areas are built on incomplete understandings, the resulting arguments will be lacking in validity in the field and the thesis is in jeopardy.

When confronted with new or different perspectives, data, or ideas, the learner often experiences a "disorienting event" (Ranton, p. 48). At the point of this conflict, the researcher is confronted with what to do with this new information. Does one choose to assimilate this new information to change the horizon of her understanding? Or is the knowledge rejected because it does not conform to the current

horizon that is familiar and comfortable? Transformational learning takes place when the researcher is able to use the new paradigm to re-orient their perspectives towards new understandings about reality or concepts. This choice Lonergan calls an “intellectual conversion,” which is the “radical clarification and, consequently, the elimination of an exceeding stubborn and misleading myths concerning reality, objectivity and human knowledge” (p. 238). Feischer (2006) points out that in Lonergan’s cognitive process, these conversions can be both “evolutionary” or “revolutionary.” If evolutionary, then ideas are shaped by new information. If revolutionary, however, this is often disorienting and causes a deep existential crisis. However, if the researcher is unable to part with previously held conceptions or flaws in their understanding, the research process is thwarted. When this happens, research devolves from critical investigation to a form of apologetics or polemics to re-enforce existing misinformation and biases. Worse, the researcher remains unchanged and untransformed in their understanding.

Yet, for doctoral students, no process is more important than these intellectual conversions as their understanding of their field of study must progress from sufficient knowledge in undergrad to mastery of knowledge in graduate school. At the doctoral level, the student is seeking to build expertise in a field, which requires a fundamental knowledge of the conversations in the field and the assumptions by which the field operates. Exposure to these conversations is the beginning. It is the intellectual conversion to a new paradigm that truly creates the scholar or expert and matures the understanding of the topic being researched. Feisher (2016) notes, “To educate religiously means creating educational climates that are loving and engaging, assisting others in their movements toward authenticity and self-transcendence” (p. 158).

It is this paradigm of intellectual conversions that this paper seeks to explore in the Spirit-empowered five-fold framework as key growth moments for doctoral students. Each of the five-fold gospel tenets of Spirit-empowered Christianity are more than just doctrines; they are the key conversion movements the believer must experience in the *ordo salutis*. How can the categories of Jesus as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer,

Spirit-baptizer, and Soon-coming King help Spirit-empowered doctoral students confront these critical conflicts? I suggest that these spiritual conversion moments in the life of a believer correspond to intellectual conversion moments in Spirit-empowered framework of research.

## **Intellectual Conversion**

In the Pentecostal narrative, no doctrine is more important than salvation. Inherited from the evangelical tradition, salvation is a definite work of grace that transforms the believer from the old way of life to new life in Christ. This is a radical orientation of the self from old ideas, beliefs, and practices, to accepting new truths about God, about the self, and about the world. Conversion is a crisis in cognitive processes as much as it is spiritual or moral. Jesus calls the follower to trade love for self with love for God, including loving God “with all your mind” (Matt. 22:27, New International Version). The process of salvation begins with being confronted by the Holy Spirit that our former ways of thinking and doing are no longer acceptable. The Holy Spirit is our model of critical evaluation as the one who “convicts the world of guilt ... and in regards to sin” (John 16:9-10, NIV). The first act of a believer is being confronted with new ideas that critically assess our assumptions about the world and about ourselves. Conversion forces us to embrace critical evaluation.

In the same way that spiritual conversion involves critical evaluation of the self, the researcher is also confronted with crisis moments when “truth” is presented and the researcher is asked to lay down previous assumptions about knowledge in order to align their understanding with the data. This process can be both exciting and painful for the student. It costs something to critically assess long-held assumptions about reality, many of which have been conditioned in spiritual frameworks. Yet, just as the Spirit opens people up to truth about themselves in spiritual conversion, so too the research process can illuminate new ideas and frameworks that deepen the student’s understanding toward intellectual conversion moments. If the Spirit is indeed the Spirit of Truth that guides us into all truth, then research is a deeply spiritual quest for truth, wherever it may be found. Whether that is deeper critical study of the Word of God, or probing philosophical

questions about reality, or empirical research of phenomenology of faith, each of these acts of critical research provide deeper understanding into God's world and humanity's relationship to it.

## **Intellectual Sanctification**

In the Spirit-empowered tradition, sanctification has a variety of meanings. Initially as an outgrowth of the Holiness movement, Pentecostalism held that both salvation and sanctification were “works of grace” that were brought by the Spirit. In the Holiness framework, sanctification was a work of the Spirit to cleanse the believer from the power of sin in order to equip the believer to live a life of holiness. This was most often an altar experience when Pentecostals had to “pray through” to victory as the Spirit did a cleansing work. While other streams of Pentecostalism eventually de-emphasized sanctification as crisis experience, they all maintained that walking in sanctification was essential. As Wolfgang Vondey (2017) describes, “The experience of sanctification therefore continues the Pentecostal emphasis on salvation as praxis and puts into contrast how Christian practices embrace both the believer's encounter with Christ in justification and the reception of the Holy Spirit in terms of sanctification” (p. 60). Sanctification, then, keeps the salvation experience alive through staying open to the Spirit's revealing of areas of distortion from the truth about ourselves and about God.

Similarly, research can be an intellectually sanctifying process. Our exposure to information and ideas not only informs our understanding of the subject of our research, but places the spotlight on ourselves as the researcher. This intersection of critical information assessment and critical self-assessment challenges the student to confront the unconscious biases and “unquestioned habits of the mind” that shape our understanding (Cranton, p. 22). Critical inquiry, much like conviction of the Spirit with sin, can expose those distorted perspectives, not to condemn us for them, but rather to help the researcher be aware of these distortions so that one can be more objective.

Therefore, like sanctification, critical reflection must be a continual work. It takes critical reflexivity to continually assess and address the



relationship between themselves as the researcher and the research they are conducting (Li Mao et al., 2016). As I say to my students, before we can exegete the passage, we must first exegete ourselves and our own motivations for engaging in this research. This attitude of critical reflexivity is an important disposition of openness that allows information to modify and shape us, taking the research process to a very personal level. This is why Li Mao et al. (2016) conclude, “The self or identity of the researcher is the core of the research journey and significantly impacts the ongoing research process, particularly the choice and development of methodology” (p. 5). What is changing in the transformational learning process, then, is the self-understanding, more than simply the knowledge of the topic (Cranton, 2016). Only then is the research process beneficial for the topic being studied.

## **Intellectual Empowerment**

The most notable distinctive in the Spirit-empowered tradition is the emphasis on Spirit-baptism. The doctrine emerged from its Holiness roots in sanctification where the pneumatological emphasis of power and victory over sin was conflated with Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit and speaking in tongues. As early Pentecostals separated these two events, the emphasis on Spirit-baptism focused on the restoration of all the gifts of the Spirit, including speaking in tongues. The theme of empowerment was not only for witness, but demonstrated the believer’s openness to God’s power like in the days of the apostles. Spirit-baptism, then, is the believer allowing the Spirit to immerse fully into the dynamic, supernatural work of God. As Stronstad (1999) points out, the empowerment of the first century church as described in Acts empowered the church in to be a “prophethood” of all believers. This meant that the most regular sign of the Spirit’s empowerment was to prophetically speak God’s revelatory truth into the world. The signature spiritual practice in this dimension is speaking in tongues. This phenomenon serves within the logic of Pentecostalism as both the sign of the Spirit’s empowering presence, but also as the Spirit’s enablement to pray God’s intercessory prayers. Oral Roberts believed that one could pray in the Spirit, then interpret these words in the Spirit back to one’s mind to gain understanding (Isgrigg, 2018).

How might this empowering, prophetic experience be translated to the research process? Research is a process of discovery. As a discipline, it functions in the realm of information science in which access to information and the discovery of that information is governed by information logic. Yet, sometimes the tools of research are not quite enough. Many times in the research process, the student reaches dead ends and points of frustration looking for the missing elements in understanding their topic or developing their thesis. I have been there many times where I have intuited that there is something out there hidden in the vast sea of resources, but I cannot seem to find it. In this intellectual crisis, I believe that the Spirit-empowered researcher has a resource at their disposal: the power of the Spirit. If all truth is a product of the mind of God as revealed by the Holy Spirit, then the student can draw from the resources of the Spirit. When writing my thesis, many times when I was stuck, I prayed in the Spirit and asked God for wisdom to break through writer's block. Other times when I was searching for the missing evidence or ideas, I asked the Spirit to lead me to the right resource.

These moments of serendipity are nothing new to the research process. Serendipity is the unexpected discovery of ideas or information that revolutionizes our understanding. The value of serendipity is being recognized by research in many different disciplines. Lori McCay-Peet and Elaine G. Toms (2018) note that there are several kinds of serendipity in research: the discovery of something unexpected unrelated to the topic researched, the discovery of a solution to an alternative problem than the one being researched, and the discovery of a solution not expected to the topic researched. Each of these are surprise moments where new ideas are formed from unexpected places. Information retrieval systems build in some levels of serendipity in order to help researchers see topics or ideas that may trigger or stimulate ideas not yet thought of. The idea here is that filter bubbles in commercialized algorithm-based search engines like Google are good at predicting what you want to see based on past searches, but are not built to expose you to ideas that lead to serendipitous discoveries (Kop, 2012). If search results are simply providing what you were looking for, you would never break the cycle of information filter bubbles. The

serendipity principle of information science allows for personalization to maximize effective search results, while at the same time allows serendipitous exposure to ideas that were not intentionally looked for (McCay-Peet & Toms, 2018).

What I am suggesting is that the Holy Spirit is a resource for serendipity to the researcher. As Poloma and Green (2012) point out, the whole history of the Pentecostal movement is animated by the serendipitous moments and experiences of the supernatural. As a movement, it prides itself on spontaneity and surprise as the Spirit invades spaces where people are not expecting it (Bialecki, 2017). Holy Spirit has access to the “deep things” of God and knows all of the information that the researcher needs to discover. Therefore, a dependence on the revelatory nature of the Spirit is essential to the research process—not the sort of subjective reliance upon direct divine knowledge in which one divines truth in terms of “God told me.” Rather, the Holy Spirit gives divine direction in unearthing knowledge we didn’t know existed. Serendipitous moments such as glancing at a book on the shelf, or stumbling upon a concept in an unexpected place, or getting a suggestion from a colleague could be divine revelation moments that equate to Spirit-baptized intellectual conversions. These revelations empower the student not only with the fresh and innovative perspectives, but also, as Cranton (2016) points out, the empowerment gained from research breakthroughs like this propel the student’s confidence toward finding their own voice and original contributions to add to the conversation.

## **Intellectual Healing**

The fourth concept in the five-fold gospel is perhaps the Spirit-empowered movement’s most recognizable characteristic. Inherited from the mid-nineteenth century healing movement, healing was a characteristic in most evangelical revivalist movements. The recovery of the doctrine of healing was a trans-Atlantic phenomenon from healing rooms in Great Britain, to healing conferences in the U.S. Healing became an essential part of the Pentecostal ethos as most of the early Pentecostal meetings drew crowds on the promise the Jesus is the healer (Isgrigg, 2021b). So universal is this commitment that some scholars

suggest that healing—rather than speaking in tongues—has become the most recognized distinctive across all Spirit-filled communities throughout the two centuries (Dayton, 1987; Brown, 2011).

For the research process, I see healing as an incredibly important characteristic. The world is full of distortions of truth. Knowledge can be liberating for those who are allowed to flourish through education, but knowledge can also be used to oppress and control, causing trauma to vulnerable people often in marginalized or at-risk communities. Higher education is recognizing the impact that trauma has on graduate education (Stephens, 2020). Therefore, trauma-informed pedagogy is a growing necessity for educators in order to provide the type of environment that is conducive to transformational learning through safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. Two characteristics that are most important in the research process are choice and empowerment. The value of choice is important because control is a high source of trauma in which individuals lose their agency. For doctoral students, the freedom and agency of self-guided research allows for the direction of the research to be controlled by the student. Thus, they are free to choose what they investigate and guide the meaning-making process of those ideas.

In a traditional sense, many students recognize from a Christian worldview perspective that secularism and other ideas can distort truth from being fully apprehended in the academic pursuit. At the same time, just because someone comes to research from a “biblical” worldview does not mean that those biblical ideas are not distorted by all kinds of biases, myths, and uncritical assumptions. Even ardent students of the Bible are captive to cultural distortions of knowledge depending on the horizons of their perspectives.

A perfect example of this is the testimony of some minorities who go through the education process but never learn of their own perspectives are valuable (Ulmer, 2019). Many women in academia have discovered through their research that culturally shaped theological perspectives contributed to constraints upon their own views of themselves (Barr, 2021). Some discover through research that perspectives they had been told by their faith communities were not biblical and outside the realm of orthodoxy were not only affirmed in

scholarly research, but are also universally accepted outlooks on these issues. Many of these enculturated perspectives are traumatizing to the individual, though they do not recognize it. Baldwin (2018) describes sin related to trauma as the “abuse of relational power” and related to theological education that can shape one’s ability to exercise theological autonomy. Many faith communities that use confessional theology regulate who has a say, who is empowered to do ministry, and what ideas and perspectives are authoritative and accepted in the community. Research can be a liberating work of the Spirit to expose people to ideas that give self-agency to the student. Shelly Rambo (2010) describes this process as the “middle work” (p. 116) of the Spirit where the Spirit is free to intersect trauma and release the understanding of God from the trauma of colonial, oppressive theological constructs so that the Spirit may give new life to words, ideas, and thoughts.

In these moments, research becomes a moment of intellectual healing that gets to the root of the distortion and brings clarity and grounding to their topic and knowledge. Baldwin (2017) describes the salvation of traumatic experiences this way:

Salvation or healing ... includes welcoming home parts of self and community who have been estranged and exiled, overcoming the internal tug-of-war as protective systems vie for control in how to negotiate the world. (Chapter 7)

Brown and Toumey (2017) point out that when someone has experienced trauma, using action-based activities to address that trauma can bring healing and new bursts of creativity. They point to actions, such as painting or drawing related to their trauma, can break through trauma to achieve healing. I would suggest that research does the same thing. Exposure to information allows researchers to expose places of intellectual bondage and begins healing when they are given permission to read outside normal boundaries of discussion.

## **Intellectual Hope**

The fifth tenet in the five-fold gospel is that of the doctrine of the return of Christ, or “soon-coming king.” Eschatology is at the heart of Pentecostal theology because the resurgence of the baptism in the

Spirit is seen as an “end time” restoration in God’s eschatological plan (Isgrigg, 2019). The return of Christ is labeled by many Pentecostals as the rapture, but the most common name for the event was “The Blessed Hope” (Isgrigg, 2021). Pentecostals imagined the coming of Christ as a hopeful event in which resurrection will take place, justice will be done, and peace will come to the earth as Jesus sets up his kingdom. The expectation of Christ’s coming is a work of the Spirit as the bride of Christ eagerly anticipates the coming of Christ very soon. Unfortunately, some have used Christ’s coming as a tool to induce fear in people by warning that those who are not ready will be left behind in the tribulation. But the appeal to fear as a motivation for faith is the antithesis of hope. Instead, “Hope is an emotional response that can only be generated by the expectation of something good in the future” (Isgrigg, 2021a, p. 216). The future is good and should not be feared because Christ and his full revelation is the goal of the future.

This tension between fear and hope is also present in the research process. There are multiple reasons why research can be a fearful process. First, Sample (2020) notes the growing awareness of library anxiety in students, especially in non-traditional and international students. Students often fear asking for help due to the perception that there is something wrong with them if they do not know how to research. Furthermore, for some students, finding new information can also cause anxiety and can often result in “information selecting” behavior when the threat of information might come with discomfort or cognitive dissonance (Case, Andrews, Johnson, & Allard, 2005). Because information may bring this feeling of uncertainty, Case, Andrews, Johnson and Allard (2005) posits the Uncertainty Management Theory as a “sophisticated way explaining avoidance because it highlights how people sometimes deliberately increase uncertainty” (p. 355). The avoidance of new ideas leads to information-seeking behavior that offers the safety of reinforcing ideologies, rather than critically assessing them (Fleischer, 2016). This is confirmed by studies that show that people of strong religious faith are more inclined to engage in “selective exposure to attitude congruent information” rather than seek out the broader range of possibilities to critically assess (Cragun, 2020).

One thing that may encourage avoidance in theological research is the tensions associated with engaging in critical thinking about ideas that are deeply held as religious beliefs. The long-held conflict between fundamentalism and liberalism conditions many students to fear that certain ideas, methodologies, or hermeneutical frameworks are incongruous with traditional Christian teachings and should be feared. Particularly in the Pentecostal tradition, higher education has had an uneasy relationship with Pentecostal understandings of “faith fidelity” (Topf, 2021). Rather than seeing education and research as a path toward a greater understanding of truth, education is often seen as a process that leads one away from truth. While higher education is liberalizing by nature because it is designed to expose students to a wide range of disciplines and concepts, Bročić and Miles (2021) have disproven the claim that higher education erodes moral absolutes and show that education develops moral absolutes twice as often as religiosity alone. This means that education and research actually strengthen convictions by building openness to considering other people’s perspectives, which fosters empathy and awareness of biases that animate moral conviction. Similarly, Fliesher (2006) found in studying graduate education that “sustained critical reflection deepened student’s faith and spirituality, rather than weakened it” (p. 160). Nevertheless, these attitudes about higher education continue to exist. This means that Christian students are not only dealing with the normal cognitive and social barriers to learning but may also have an added level of fear that too much learning or exposure to ideas could be detrimental to their faith.

In addition, students from a Spirit-empowered tradition often come from independent charismatic backgrounds that are not situated into any confessional community. In these contexts, the arbiters of knowledge and truth are often charismatic personalities who are seen as the primary authority to whom divine revelation is given. The veneration of ecclesial authority because of the attribution of charismatic leadership or signs and wonders ministry tends to engender a lack of critical analysis of ideas related to Scripture, God, and truth (Christerson & Flory, 2017). I have encountered students who dismiss reputable scholarly perspectives simply because a pastor or spiritual

authority has told them otherwise. Cacciatore et al. (2018) have documented that evangelical Christians are more trusting of religious authorities than academic or scientific authorities about information in general. They tend to trust people more than the evidence of the claim itself. In this context, authority of information is ultimately determined by who said it, rather than critical assessment of the validity, evidence, or grounding in research of that statement. These socially conditioned epistemological presuppositions are often hard to part with when confronted with scholarly, research-based data.

But just as one should not fear the full revelation of Christ at his second coming, there is no need for Spirit-empowered students to fear the revelation of knowledge and truth in academic research. Hope is an essential element of research and discovery. Hope involves anticipation of what could be out there to discover. It engenders in people an openness to the future. An openness to research and new ideas is an act of hope. As Kearney (1998) notes, theology itself is a work of the imagination. The world is far too complex and socially contextualized for any one person to ascertain the vast realm of factors that shape human reality. In effort to order our thoughts about the world, humans naturally fill in the blanks through the imagination to create a narrative about reality. This means that concepts of truth are ultimately shaped by “how we imagine the world before we ever think about it.” (Smith, 2009, p. 66). Critically evaluating these imagined realities is essential to a student’s self-understanding and growth. In this sense, our openness to ideas is not an affront to the truths of our faith; rather, they have the possibility of increasing our capacity to understand reality in ways not possible before. Just as openness is the key to breakthroughs in science and medical research, openness is key for students to allow student room to discover, evaluate, critique, and assimilate ideas from all corners of God’s vast expanse of knowledge in order to bring new revelation to contemporary understandings of theological topics. As Yong (2009) notes, the pneumatological imagination presupposes that all knowledge of God begins with the Holy Spirit, who is “the divine mind that illuminates the rationality of the world to human minds” (p. 123). With the Spirit guiding us, why should we fear?



## Conclusion

Theological research is not just a cognitive enterprise; it is in many ways an epistemological experience with the Spirit that shapes both knowledge and self-understanding. My task as an educator is to encourage students not only to prepare for these intellectual conversions but also to encourage them to seek them out as the goal of education. It would be tragic for a student to exit a doctoral program having gained little more than a better understanding of the things that student already knew. While this reinforcement may feel like a good outcome for students, it is far from transformative education. As Spirit-empowered educators, we must help students discover knowledge and truth with joy and hope is a much more consequential task. The work students do is far too important not to be transformed by the research process. For D.Min. students, their expertise in ministry can reshape how ministry praxis is carried out by implementing the best research at the ground level. This requires the researcher to use critical reflection, analysis, and inquiry that leads to concrete theories of human experience. In order to do this, one must complexify the situation that is being examined through interdisciplinary research. For Ph.D. students, critical reflection is essential to the creation of new knowledge in a field of expertise. Determining the gap in research requires reading widely, thinking creatively, and researching exhaustively to fully grasp the problems and the potential solutions. New theories must be imagined that take into account the voluminous research done by others, both in the specific field and across disciplines, in order to fully imagine what is possible.

This responsibility can be overwhelming to a new doctoral student. Therefore, I try to normalize for my students the perpetual feeling of “being in over your head” that comes with this process of intellectual growth. But the ability to communicate these necessary intellectual conversions in the vernacular of the Spirit-filled life can be another tool to inspire the student to embrace the transformation that will take place. In all of this, I see the Spirit at work, in the research and writing process as truth is revealed, the imagination is inspired, and knowledge is created for betterment of theological reflection.

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