

A Strategic Vision for CTS

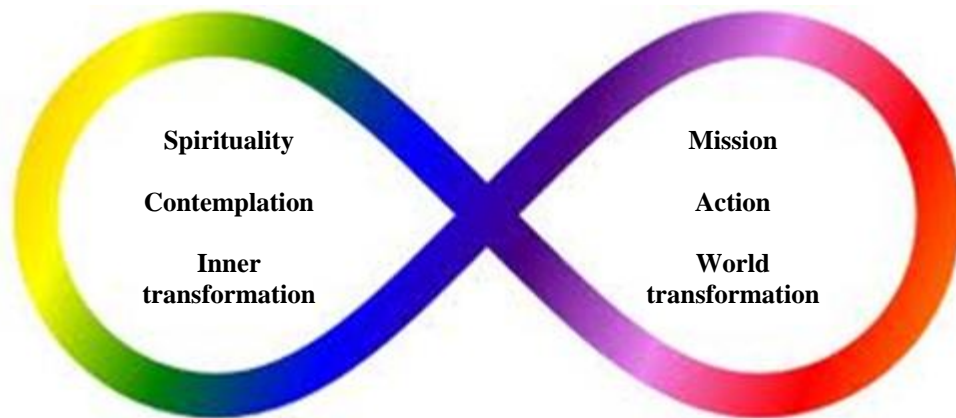
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The God of Abraham and Sarah; of Jesus of Nazareth and Mary, his mother; of Dorothy Day and Desmond Tutu — is present and active in the world around and within us. The many modes of divine presence include, on one hand, justice and kindness, restorative ways of God’s being for the world. And on the other hand, the many modes of divine presence also include wonder, mystery, and compassion, sublime and sometimes inscrutable ways of God’s being with the world.

Christian disciples and communities of discipleship seek to respond faithfully to these modes of divine presence. Our receiving and responding to divine love, wonder, and mystery, our individual and communal tending to the garden of the heart, may be gathered under the shorthand heading, “spirituality.” Our receiving and participating in divine justice and kindness, our individual and communal tending to the garden of creation, may be gathered under the shorthand heading, “mission” or “justice.”

In Christian life at its best, these two modes of participation and response to God’s presence — spirituality and mission — are deeply and mutually related, with each proceeding from and leading into the other. We imagine a continuous, mutually informing *movement* along a figure eight or infinity sign, with mission on one side and spirituality on the other, representing the pathway from “inner life” to “outer life” and back again, wholeness of creation to wholeness of heart. In monastic terms, we might say, “action” and “contemplation.” We envision not an endless, closed loop but rather an unfolding journey of transformation, disruption, and growth along the way.



Imagine a seminary radically and thoroughly organized along these lines. A graduate school of higher education, focused on knowledge of Christian traditions, knowledge of humanity, knowledge of the world, and knowledge of the skills that make for effective Christian ministry. And at the same time, a school that seeks to orient this knowledge – theory, content, and skills – toward Christian discipleship, and in particular, toward the dynamic, mutually informing figure eight just described: spirituality and mission inseparably linked, each continually coloring, transforming, and leading into the other.

An approach like this one might tap into two hungers that are very real in North America today: first, the desire for ways to make a genuine difference for the good, to be wisely “missional”; and second, the yearning for ways to be personally whole, fully alive, not merely a peacemaker but also a person at peace. Both mission and spirituality require knowledge, education, and cultivation. Both require critical and

constructive perspectives. And moreover, each requires the other to flourish fully. Mission without spirituality is frequently hollow, often self-serving, eventually exhausting; spirituality without mission is frequently disoriented, often self-absorbed, eventually adrift.

What would this look like at CTS? And what if we at CTS (because of the Counseling Center, and also because of interdisciplinary faculty members who already build bridges along these lines) are the perfect North American seminary to manifest this approach for the twenty-first century?

CTS courses could be designed intentionally to work differently and in complementary ways within this spiritual-missional figure eight: on one hand, focusing on particular social issues and modes of action, and on the other hand, focusing on particular spiritual practices and modes of reception, aware on both sides of our understandings and experiences of God. Some courses might include both missional and spiritual material; others would focus primarily on one or the other, but always to some extent in view of the other side of the figure eight. One of the goals of such an approach would be to live into the many ways in which both dimensions connect and inform each other, fostering a theological education that shows the way toward critical theological perspectives as well as deeper spiritual awareness and responses to divine love.

The pathways of study at CTS could be intentionally arranged so that students graduate with (1) more knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to “wisely making a graceful difference in the world” on one hand (mission), and (2) more knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to “cultivating a life alive to grace” on the other (spirituality). This kind of thinking may be particularly promising because (1) it would in fact be a revolutionary shift in terms of North American theological education, and (2) it would in fact be an organic extension/development of many dynamics that have existed at CTS for many years (the Counseling Center; peer group education; the particular work of many CTS faculty; etc.).

Moreover, it is promising because it would be quite attractive to (1) people who want to help lead/serve congregations (clergy, educators, and lay leaders), since congregations should be nothing if not missional-spiritual centers of growth and life, and (2) people who want to do a whole range of other things (counselors, scholars, nurses, lawyers, plumbers, artists, etc.), who may not desire a master’s degree, but who nonetheless want to ground their lives and work in spiritual and missional aspects of Christian faith.

We propose that we adopt the spiritual-missional figure eight as our fundamental organizing principle, while at the same time naming three distinctive accents which will serve to help orient, animate, and propel movement along that figure eight. We understand these distinctive accents to arise out of the seminary’s storied history and current strengths:

- A. Education in and through the arts
- B. Education in and through immersive experience and reflection, including special attention to contextual analysis and interpretation
- C. Education for and with a religiously, sociologically, and culturally diverse range of participants, including special emphasis on inclusive and respectful conversation across differences

Were we to adopt this approach, what would it look like “on the ground”? Rather than a fully articulated, institution-wide, one-size-fits-all approach, we propose that we enter into a period of creative, flexible, organic design as a school, living into the spiritual-missional figure eight in a wide variety of ways. Each faculty member, staff member, and trustee would be challenged to engage and strengthen the pattern from one or more of the following angles (this list is partial and representative):

- 1) **Communications:** Presenting CTS – in all external and internal communications – as a school fundamentally organized in the ways described above.
- 2) **Meeting Culture:** In various ways, intentionally infuse meetings at CTS with inviting, provocative missional emphases and spiritual practices, not as cursory preliminary work or going-through-the-motions, but rather as activities at the heart of what we do and who we are at CTS.
- 3) **Courses:** Designing, redesigning, or strengthening CTS courses so as to highlight and explore the spiritual and/or missional dimensions of Christian life; the ways in which our teaching and learning happen in and through the arts; the ways in which our teaching and learning happen through immersive experience and reflection (appropriately combined with acquisition of content and critical thinking skills); and the ways in which our teaching and learning happen for and with a religiously, sociologically, and culturally diverse array of participants. New course formats and modes of course delivery will be part and parcel of this work.
- 4) **Degrees:** Designing, redesigning, or strengthening CTS degree programs and other pathways of study so as to mirror the principles in #3 above. In particular, this includes envisioning and implementing ways in which the Counseling Center degree programs and the MDiv degree programs can more fully interact, integrate, and synergize. New degree formats and modes of course delivery will be part and parcel of this work.
- 5) **Co-Curricular Programming:** Seminary events, forums, informal activities, and so on, intentionally complementing and pursuing the principles described above.
- 6) **Student Organization:** Continuing to develop our peer-group-based strategy for students to build relationships and intentionally deepen their movement along the spiritual/missional figure eight.
- 7) **Community Participation:** Committing anew to take part regularly – sometimes as a leader, sometimes as a participant – in spiritual and missional activities (chapel worship, prayer or meditation groups, days of service, community meals, etc.).