

**Richard F. Ward**

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**With your fresh eyes, please tell our readers something about PTS that they might not know but you think they should.**

When I first came to Phillips, I was impressed that it had offered theological education to two pastors who have had differing yet significant impact on the shape and future of the church: Robin Meyers and Craig Groeschel. Robin is pastoring the Mayflower United Church of Christ in Oklahoma City and Craig is pastor of LifeChurch, based just down the road in Edmond.

With his teaching and prophetic yet pastoral preaching, Robin is in the mold of William Sloane Coffin whose life and work took aim at the comfort and complacency of settled political power. Craig, on the other hand, has developed the resources of the digital culture to articulate what most North Americans call “evangelical”, emphasizing the salvation and instruction of the individual soul. Both, in their own contrasting, even conflicting ways, unsettle the status quo for the sake of the gospel.

**Characterize your teaching style or describe a commitment that shapes your teaching.**

When I was a student at Oklahoma Baptist University, I had a professor that wrote on the board in big letters: THINK FIRST, THEN SPEAK. That became a core value in my own teaching. I do a lot of thinking before I speak to a class. Yet, I don’t like to ‘just lecture.’ I didn’t learn from that method very well and I am not sure that I am at my best when I stand up in front of a group of students and read from some paper that I have written. I like the liveliness of exchange and interaction – it feeds me when I am conveying information that pushes us and shapes our ministries. I do come in prepared to offer ‘prompts’ that will generate discussions and perhaps take us deeper into the material than I could do strictly on my own. My “prompts” feature my reflections on readings as well as my experience, the reported experiences of others, performances of texts and stories, and my own questions.

**In your opinion, how is online education changing the face of education?**

Online education is the future and like it or not, that future is here! When I finished my doctorate and began teaching I did not have my own computer, we did not have email (we still were cramming faculty boxes with memos!), and there were no such things as cell phones. It’s ironic that for someone like me who writes liberally about “performance” and “embodiment” and has insisted on defining ‘presence’ as being a preacher in the same room as the congregants now has to figure out how to teach preaching and worship online! I am skeptical that it can be done but then again, I didn’t think I would ever learn how to do email either!

**Tell us something about a scholarly project that is occupying your attention.**

Most of my scholarly work arises out of my interest in narrative and in performance theory. I like defining what I mean by ‘performance’ and recovering that as a viable metaphor and method in my writing and in my practice. Specifically I am working on a book in conjunction with David Trobisch and others in the Scholars Seminar serving the Network of Biblical Storytellers to deepen performance practice and criticism within homiletics and biblical studies. The material in the New Testament was first experienced by folks who were barely literate – if at all – as performances in various modes and genres.

**Name a hope you have for the students at PTS.**

“Faith” is not an object that you can ‘lose’ once you come to seminary as if it were a revered watch your grandparents gave you. It is not something that can be ‘stolen’ by a professor either. I am not sure ‘faith’ is even an ‘it!’ Faith is organic. Faith has a beating heart but faith also has a mind. Faith is a way of being in the world. I must say I am alarmed by the anti-intellectualism that infects not only society but our churches. It seems that people are afraid to think! And if they are afraid to think, then I think the range of feeling, capacity to empathize and have compassion, is severely limited. My hope is that students who come to and leave Phillips will be thinking, feeling, compassionate, fully-human persons who are available and sensitive to the Spirit of God that I believe sent them here.

**Which book have you read recently that you would commend highly to our readers.**

One of the last books I read is Fred Craddock’s *Reflections on My Call to Preach* (Chalice, 2009). Another one is Thomas G. Long’s *Preaching From Memory to Hope* (WJK, 2009). Both Craddock and Long have been long time friends, colleagues and mentors and have shaped my understanding and approach to preaching in a way that I cannot measure. Since I am also a history buff, I am reading Nathaniel Philbrook’s *The Last Stand* and I am eagerly waiting for Jonathan Franzen’s new novel *Freedom* to be released!