

Class notes: A gift that keeps on giving

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [February 22, 2003](#) issue

Those of us who have had some experience of theological education in a sense live out of that experience for the rest of our lives. Each experience is unique, of course. I showed up at the University of Chicago Divinity School and Chicago Theological Seminary at a time when those two schools, along with two others, constituted the Federated Theological Faculty. My bags were barely unpacked when the FTF dissolved and the four schools went their separate ways. Entering students had to decide with which institution to cast their lot. I chose the divinity school, but continued to pay my bills and enjoyed my friendships at CTS, and on graduation day received a diploma from each. Ever since I have been a grateful observer of denominational and independent seminaries and university divinity schools, an occasional visitor and teacher, board member, fund raiser and cheerleader.

In his review of the essays collected in *Theological Literacy for the Twenty-First Century*, [William Placher considers](#) some of the challenges and dilemmas facing seminaries, especially mainline Protestant ones. He admits that he can get discouraged by the thought of how much 21st-century seminary graduates ought to know. Along the way he puts into words one of my deepest convictions about my vocation, namely that the “future of mainline Protestantism depends in part on its ability to appeal to the concerns and interests of thoughtful Christians.” Mainline Protestants, he adds, have this strength: they have “wonderful, complicated, endlessly rich news” to convey.

Come to think about it, that’s exactly what captured my heart and mind when I sat down at a one-arm half desk, deeply scarred by ballpoint etchings, took out my notebook and heard Joseph Sittler lecture on theology. I heard the “wonderful, complicated, endlessly rich news” of the gospel. What a gift those years were. Thanks be to God that because of the creativity, passion and resiliency of theological schools, those kinds of experiences are still happening.