Transforming the Mind in the Service of God:
A Case for Theological Education

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"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect." Letter to the Romans 12: 2

The Moment

Over the past few years, I have become increasingly familiar with MapQuest and the various GPS devices that help us navigate our roadways. I can't remember now what we did without them, though I do have a vague recollection of being lost fairly often. I also have some memory of certain intense conversations occurring in our car in which my spouse said, "Why don't you just stop and ask directions?" And I responded, "I'm sure that the last street we passed was where we should have turned." Technology, mercifully, has made those conversations less frequent. But, I've discovered that I still find it helpful to buy maps for one simple reason: I want to know where I am in relation to where I am bound. I want a complete orientation to my journey so that I can imagine the whole thing. In other words, I want to know more than just what my next turn should be.

Sometimes—and this is true of both travel and life in general—we locate ourselves *temporally* as much as *spatially*. Sometimes knowing *where* we are means knowing *when* we are.

Pondering the church's "location" today, I have become convinced that we are living in an exceptional historical moment, at least for Protestant Christianity: a moment I would characterize as *axial*.

The term "axial" was first applied as a historical metaphor by Karl Jaspers, a prolific and influential philosopher of the twentieth century. Jaspers tried to account for the rise of humanity's self-consciousness and the emergence of many of the great spiritual traditions by pointing to *an axis of world history* around which our intellectual, moral, and spiritual history turns. He identified a specific historical era (between 800 and 200 B.C.E.) when Confucius and Lao-Tzu lived in China, the Buddha came to prominence in India, Zarathustrian thought first emerged in present-day Iran, Heraclitus and Plato taught in Greece, and Hebrew prophets burst upon the scene in Palestine. This was a time of terror, Jaspers observed, an age of radical questioning, when settled orthodoxies were subjected to fresh examination and the basic ends of human existence were renegotiated.[1]

The intellectual and spiritual history of humanity, according to Jaspers, turned around this axial age, this axis of history, and as it turned the entire human world was unsettled by the turning. The trajectories that arced from this axial age into the present were divergent in convictions and doctrines. The spiritual paths of renunciation and of embrace; of solitude, meditation and prayer; of social justice and wisdom; of prophecy as an ecstatic experience and as a proclamation of God's reign can all be traced to the refracted light that illuminated humankind in those centuries. Humanity, Jaspers tell us, "took a forward leap" in this time, but it was a leap predicated on struggle, uncertainty, and ambiguity.[2]

Today we live in an axial age. Ours may not be the same in scale or in effect as that which Jaspers described. But, I have found Jasper's metaphor helpful in understanding the

moment in which we live, especially as Protestant Christians. Whether we are in conversation with James Davison Hunter's fascinating recent study, *To Change the World*, in which he reflects on what he describes as "the irony, the tragedy and possibility of Christianity in the late modern world"; or with Kathryn Tanner's brilliant theological analysis of contemporary postmodern culture; or with economist Robert William Fogel's sweeping study of a trans-cultural "fourth Great Awakening"; or any number of other recent sociological, political, economic, or theological theories accounting for the various movements of the tectonic plates on which our cultural continents ride, this much is clear: we have become peculiarly conscious of our precarious position in the world, and many of the certainties of our childhood have been shaken.[3] Modernity, Post-modernity, and a score or so of other post-adjectival-modifiers locate us in a time in which so much is up for grabs that we are having a hard time discerning who we are, where we are, what we should do, and where we should go.

Theological schools are right in the middle of this axial moment, because the church is right in the middle of this moment. [4] Most if not all of the issues that challenge the church also challenge the seminaries. And among the issues that challenge us most today is the one issue that called seminaries into existence in the first place: *the theological education of persons for ordained ministry*.

In certain ecclesiastical circles it has become commonplace today to say that seminary education is unnecessary for those who will lead our congregations and provide leadership for various forms of ministry in society.

Well, I would like to confirm to you that seminary education is indeed *unnecessary*. The critics of graduate-level theological education are correct on this point. It is unnecessary to be biblically and theologically educated in order to carry out many of the basic ministerial

functions. Rudimentary training is sufficient for most folks to get the right end of the baby wet, or to pour juice and serve crackers while saying the prescribed words. And it takes virtually no training at all, except basic computer skills, to steal a good sermon—though one might argue that it takes considerable theological knowledge to figure out which sermon you ought to steal.

The point that I want to make is that we asking the wrong question when we inquire whether it is necessary to have a seminary education in order to perform acts of ministry.

The right question, and the question that brought seminaries and other forms of theological education into existence in the first place—the question that has endured not for a hundred years nor even for five hundred years, but that has been around for two thousand years—is more complicated. Indeed, it is a two-fold question: *What quality of ministry best serves the gospel?* And: *how do we best prepare persons for that quality of ministry?* The question, in other words, is not one of *minimal qualifications to fulfill ecclesiastical functions*. It concerns, rather, the types, qualities, and character of leadership our church needs if it is to thrive, to flourish, to "be filled up with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19). What kind of ministers can cultivate a reflective and transformative faith among the people of God, helping them to envision and to live the sort of "life that truly is life-giving in and for the sake of the world?"[5]

There have been few moments in Christianity's history when more was at stake than at this moment. There have been few moments in Christianity's history when we have needed a thinking faith, a theologically reflective faith, a generous and critical, imaginative and deeply engaged faith more than we do today.

We live at a moment—an axial moment for Protestant Christianity—when the arguments for an educated ministry can no longer be taken for granted. We must argue persuasively today

for an educated ministry if we care about the *quality* of preaching and worship of God, the *quality* of pastoral care and counseling, the *quality* of Christian teaching and nurture, the *quality* of mission and service and evangelism.

I do not know if my arguments will prove convincing. But I do hope that my comments, if they do nothing else, will encourage each of us to come up with our own cases for a well-informed, knowledgeable, wise, and well-educated ministry, because I want to share a little non-secret with you: *We're losing this argument in today's culture.* And I think we're losing this argument primarily because we have taken it for granted for so long.

There are forces in our culture that thrive on reductionism, superstition, and hatred—forces that work overtime to promote ignorance in the name of piety and the advancement of fear and anxiety in the name of devotion. There are forces in our culture that despise critical thinking, especially when it comes to religious faith. These forces appreciate the value of propaganda and the kind of religious training and indoctrination that marches in step. But they look upon genuine theological education as a threat to faith.

The cost could hardly be higher. Many of us were reminded in the summer of 2010 of the costs of an uneducated church when a sincere, zealous, and (by his own lights) deeply devoted minister of a congregation in Florida grabbed the public microphone for a good deal longer than his allotted fifteen minutes of fame, and called upon fellow Christians around the world to burn the holy book of another faith (one he has never actually read) to show their devotion to Jesus. We were further reminded early in 2011 when the same minister, now operating largely without a congregation but with the benefit of an even wider audience followed through on his threat by holding a mock trial and execution of the Koran.

The cost could hardly be higher. We have read the awful stories of a congregation from Topeka, Kansas, whose members protest the funerals of fallen American servicemen because of their religiously inspired hatred of people who do not share their moral values. The fact that they have a constitutionally guaranteed right to express their opinions does not mean that their message is any less hateful.

The cost could hardly be higher to our society and to the world if we opt for an uneducated church.

We do not ask for the moment history gives us. History is thrust upon us all. But make no mistake about it: this is our moment, our axial age, when the world turns upon its temporal axis. We must either stand up to be counted for a thinking faith, or stand idly by on the sidelines while hatred, prejudice, intolerance, and every form of violence take their turns doing their worst in the name of God.

Education alone will not solve every problem, not even theological education. We know this. Education alone will not heal our every disease, nor deliver us from every evil. But theological education can teach us that we don't have to be mean or stupid to follow Jesus of Nazareth. And in our culture today, this is one of the most countercultural messages we can articulate.

The church always stands just one generation, just one short step away from the sort of narrow-mindedness and reactivity against others that we've seen on our television screens a hundred times, or that we have felt rising up in ourselves in our own worst moments, when the better angels of our souls struggled against our own inner demons, when we felt threatened, worried, or anxious. Therefore I want to argue for education—for graduate-level theological

education of a particular quality and kind—for the sake of the church's life and ministry in God's world.

There are several contributions to the life and faith of the church that theological education makes and that nothing else can do quite as well. Theological education *informs*, certainly, transmitting important facts from one generation to another. It also *forms* persons in faith and for ministry, allowing them to mature into the kinds of people suited to lead congregations. But among the things theological education does best, and the reason it is so important, is because it also *transforms* persons. Theological education transforms persons specifically for public ministry. It is able to do this because the content and the subject matter of theological education is the gospel of Jesus Christ, which *transforms* us and invites us into *the ministry of transformation*. Theological education changes us in fundamental ways.

This has been, of course, the deep suspicion of generations of worried folks who have sent their students off to seminary with the warning that it will destroy their faith. I am here to tell you that (in some sense) their fears are warranted.

When theological education works, it does (again, *in some sense*) destroy our faith. At least, it challenges and calls into question, it critiques and examines and sometimes dismantles the faith we brought to seminary. It does this because such reshaping of faith from the ground up is essential for the making of ministers who can lead the church in its ministry of grace and justice for the sake of God's world.

A year or two years or ten years after graduation from seminary, a former student (by then a minister) stands at the door of the emergency room as the ambulance pulls up, and the small body of a child run over while participating in her church's CROP Walk is pulled out on the gurney—and that minister is the person who holds the family in her arms and in her prayers

as their world collapses around them. It is it is at this moment when the minister knows that, had her faith not been dismantled brick by brick and rebuilt with critical attention to details she never imagined before seminary, had the Walls of Jericho not fallen around her head in her class on Hebrew scripture, then she would have no firm foundation today when that family needs her not to fall apart.

A year or two years or ten years after graduation from seminary, a former student (by then in leadership of a congregation)—a former student who, at the beginning of seminary, protected with reinforced walls the faith he brought to seminary, defending it against every onslaught of critical argument—that student will preach after planes fly into tall buildings and the wreckage scatters across the heart of a nation. And, standing amid the wreckage, when many are calling for hatred and vengeance, and something else even more difficult to name that would sacrifice the message of Christ's cross in a heartbeat to buy a measure of national security, then this minister knows that the faith he brought to seminary had to die if he is ever to preach what the author of the Letter to the Hebrews calls "a better resurrection."

Theological education transforms us so we can lead the church as the church engages in its ministry of grace and justice for the sake of God's world.

Certainly, theological education *informs* us. But it's not the information alone that we need. Certainly, theological education also *forms* us. But, as important as formation is, it falls short. Theological education necessarily *transforms* us, because only if we have passed through the crucible of transformation can we believe strongly enough so that we can doubt what has always been accepted, or imagine what has never before been seen.

The transformative power of theological education is not restricted to graduate-level seminary education. Every one of us has known the power of theological education to transform,

through sermons, Bible studies, mission trips, and counseling sessions. God meets us through all of these means of grace, and again and again we are reminded that "our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:29) who purges, changes, and refines us through the flames of divine love—often by presenting us with utterly new ways to understand ourselves in relation to God and others.

At its heart, Christianity is a learned faith—and a faith that always calls us to learn more. We are all transformed through the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:1-2), as St. Paul said, and the ministry of transformation to which God calls us is for all God's people. But, in order for this ministry of transformation to flourish, we need those who lead our congregations to lead from the crucible of their own deep transformation. This transformation begins for all of us in our encounter with the message of what the late A. B. Rhodes once described as "the mighty acts of God."

The Message

In one of the most remarkable books on congregational ministry in recent years, Lillian Daniel and Martin Copenhaver's *This Odd and Wondrous Calling,* the authors explore the theological dimensions of ordinary acts of ministry. In my favorite chapter, in which Martin reflects on shaking hands at the door of the church after worship, he provides the conclusion to the last sermon he preached in one of his congregations. The sermon was titled simply, "What It's All About." Martin preached:

> As I am about to leave, there is something I want to tell you. I want to tell you what Jesus means to me. I want to share my belief that everything depends on him. I want to urge you to learn from him. I want to assure you that you can lean on him in times of trouble. I want to ask you to listen to his words of challenge. I

> want to tell you that I believe that you can entrust your life to him. I want to affirm that he is Lord of this church, and that in his name you are freed to love one another and empowered to share that love with a hurting world. I want to profess that, though once people could not look at the face of God and live, now we are invited to look at the face of God in him, in Jesus, and live as we have never lived before. He is Emmanuel, God with us, God with us all, whether we are together or apart. That's what it's all about. That's all I know. Amen.[6]

There are so many ways to articulate this central message of our faith—so many places that we may encounter it.

As a teenager, my world was turned upside-down and I was set on a path that led to my call to the ministry of Word and Sacrament by reading Leo Tolstoy's writings on Christianity. I did not know then about the ways in which Tolstoy's message had influenced Mohandas Gandhi, or Dietrich Bonhoeffer, or Martin Luther King, Jr. Years later, when I had become a pastor, I heard this message translated into the cadences of a distinctly Southern idiom by Clarence Jordan of the Koinonia Farm in Georgia. Jordan reached out to me with convicting power through his Cotton Patch Gospel, reminding me that "faith is not belief in spite of evidence, but a life in scorn of the consequences."[7]

Sometimes the message emphasizes God's reign, as in James Luther Mays' marvelous writings on the Psalms; or God's humanity, as in the writings of the late Karl Barth; or God's justice, as in the works of Abraham Joshua Heschel. Sometimes the message can touch us with the irony and tragic comedy of the human condition and the intractability of the call of God, as in the short stories of Flannery O'Connor and Miguel de Unamuno, or the novels of Marilynne Robinson. There are times in which the one thing we must hear in the message is the awesome

vastness of the God who is *within* yet *beyond* all existence—whether that vastness is expressed ecstatically by Jonathan Edwards, or with the awesome precision of process theology, or with the beautiful and searing doubt of Louise Gluck's poetry.

Or the message can, with José Miguez Bonino, challenge us to be less concerned about theoretical matters like the question of God's existence, and much more exacting in our allegiance to the God who liberates: "In truth," Miguez Bonino writes, "the important thing is precisely in *which* God we believe. . . . It is . . . significant that the early Christians were accused of being atheists and were judged and condemned as such for refusing to believe in the ruling gods of their society."[8]

The *subject matter* and *content* of theological education—the message and, indeed, the very presence of the Holy One to whom we bear witness—are what transform us. It is not the educational process that does it: the lectures, the papers, the seminars, and so forth. All of these are crucial elements in the wondrous alchemy and ecology of theological education. But, that which transforms us is *the God to whom we bear witness through the good news of the Gospel*—the God who, though we were far off, met us in Jesus Christ, and brought us home.

Our emphases in articulating this message will differ according to time and culture and historical context, but it is still the message of our most ancient mothers and fathers in the faith: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deut 6:4-5).

The message is still the message of the Prophets, from the God who cares more about justice that rolls down like a mighty rushing stream than about religious observances (Amos 5: 18-24), the God who requires above all that we love mercy, do justice and walk humbly with our God (Micah 6: 6-8).

The message is still that of the Christ of John's Gospel: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10b). It is still the message of the Jesus of Mark's Gospel: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:34-35).

The message is still that of Peter addressing the crowds at Pentecost: "Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know—this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power" (Acts 2:22-24).

The message is still that which transformed Saul into Paul: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:27-28).

The message never grows tiresome. The message always surprises. And the study of the meanings of this message is the core work of theological education.

The Meaning

Spoken in a thousand varied accents the world over, throughout the centuries, the message is at its heart and soul that of the God who became like us in Jesus of Nazareth so that we could be restored to our full humanity in Christ. Theological education conveys this message from one generation to another, but with a critical edge. At times theological education critiques

the powers and principalities that would attempt to make this message simply another commodity to be traded or another version of its own most precious story of self-actualization (that is, salvation by works). At other times theological education critiques even ministry itself, when for example ministry imitates the sins of Simon Magus, who desired the gospel as a tool to his own ends of self-promotion and power. At still other times theological education conveys the core message while also criticizing our human tendency to make God over in our own image. And sometimes, theological education conveys this message with a remarkable intimacy, inviting us (in the words of one popular scholar) to "meet Jesus again for the first time."[9]

When theological education performs its task best, it challenges us to get ourselves out of the way for the sake of our own redemption. It reminds us that we are not infinitely adorable, but that God is. The promise of the gospel is not that wherever we are lifted up, all people will be drawn to us, but that wherever Christ is lifted up, there humanity will find salvation.

Theological education also reminds us that however morally compromised even our highest standards may be, God is faithful and just, and works through imperfect people and processes to realize God's own ends. We recognize as Christians that the Holy Spirit works through the tangles of human history, through the manipulations of church courts, commissions, and councils, and even through the vagaries of political decision-making in civil and uncivil society to accomplish God's purposes in history. So also we must recognize that the Holy Spirit is at work in and through the critical research of scholars from John Calvin to Rebecca Chopp, clearing away the undergrowth of superstition, romanticism, and idealism that can choke out a bracing, true encounter with the gospel that changes lives and worlds.

There is a variety of theological work, Rowan Williams once observed, including the celebrative theology that we enact and speak, sing and represent through visual arts and dance;

the communicative theology that attempts to bridge the boundaries between theology and science, medicine, psychology, philosophy, cultural studies, and the arts; and the critical theology that examines with meticulous care the texts we hold sacred and the content of our doctrine. While theological education participates in every kind of theological work, from celebration to critical study, its primary task lies arguably in the last of these: critical engagement with texts and doctrine.[10]

This focus is necessary not only because the scholar's work, at least since the Renaissance and certainly since the Enlightenment, has been informed by a range of historical methods and philosophical assumptions which (although they may not be determinative to every encounter with the message of the Gospel) must be intelligently engaged. No, quite apart from the methods and assumptions that have emerged in scholarship during the past five hundred years, the scholar's task has *always* required faithful analytical work. It is not only for their piety that we still value Gregory of Nyssa or Friedrich Schleiermacher. We value the sharpness of their critical theological reflections. They help us think more clearly about what we believe.

Theological studies have served the church best when theology has asked its critical questions freely. Origen's creative and critical articulation of the implications of the Gospel message led both to the heresy of Arius and the orthodoxy of Athanasius. We must recognize that the relationship between church and scholarship has been stressed especially at the point of the essential critical work of theological studies. John McLeod Campbell and William Robertson Smith's scholarship, which today appear utterly within the bounds of churchly endeavors (even within the bounds of evangelical devotion), were judged heretical not that long ago.

The critical task of theological education, which can, in its more strident forms, irritate the church, remains one of the church's greatest gifts to itself, stretching us at exactly those

points where we can grow most complacent, and asking our next generation of leaders and ministers to reflect in ways that open up new and unexpected paths of faithfulness. It may be that it is precisely at this point that theological schools make their greatest contribution to society as well.

A few years ago an article by W. Robert Connor appeared in the *Chronicle of* Higher *Education* on a problem faced in many college and university classrooms. Students, it was reported, are bringing to their college classrooms questions many of their college professors feel hesitant or ill-equipped to answer. Students are bringing into university classrooms questions of ultimate meaning and purpose, asking "Why am I here?" and "Does my life have meaning?"[11] And virtually any pastor knows that the biggest question still asked in virtually every congregation is the question of evil and suffering: "How can a good God allow such suffering in this world?" While professors in many college classrooms may wish to avoid such questions (and, of course, it depends which universities we are talking about, and which class rooms), it is the bread and butter of theological education to wrestle with all of these questions. The seminary is the Big Question destination, where any and every subject can be placed on the table, poked, prodded, examined, and turned over and over again.

Thomas Merton once described the spiritual discipline of contemplation in these words: "It is as if in creating us God asked a question, and in awakening us to contemplation [God] answered the question, so that the contemplation is at the same time, question and answer."[12] The critical task of theological education—the task of grappling with the meanings in the message of the Gospel and the meanings of our humanity in light of the God of the gospel—is both a critical and a contemplative task, embodying both the question and the answer, allowing our human existence to be subjected to the critical, interrogatory examination of the message,

and allowing ourselves, through the freedom given us in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to interrogate the message in light of our lives.

It is in and through this extraordinary and critical theological engagement of our humanity and the message of the gospel that we are transformed. And it is this engagement that happens every day in seminary. This is the magic of theological education.

The Magic

There is something magical in the chemistry of the classroom when a gifted teacher in the grip of her subject, in love with her subject, in possession of her subject, even possessed by her subject, comes into contact with learners who are ready—even when the readiness presents itself as a resistance to the subject. In these moments, the task of inquiring into the meanings of the message is transformed. Magic ensues.

This is why great lectures are still great. But there is a genius in theological education beyond even this kind of genius. There is also, and even more importantly, the genius of the communal learning experience, when students and teachers who know one another well and live among one another learn together.

There are so many examples of how this occurs in graduate theological education, but at the seminary I serve, Louisville Seminary, one course, in particular, has assumed almost legendary status, a seminar that was co-taught by Craig Dykstra and Burton Cooper in the Fall of 1982 through January of 1983.

We are told in the description of the course in its syllabus that this “experimental course” is “designed to overcome the dichotomy between classroom learning and ministerial practice. The theme of the course is the Christian understanding of God as that understanding relates to

the presence of evil and suffering in human life and to our ability to endure such evil and suffering without falling into bitterness or resignation." But the syllabus only hints at what actually happened in this course.

The students had to apply to become members of the seminar. They had to agree to take on an exceptionally heavy workload, not just reading in theology and philosophy and literature, viewing films and so forth, but also writing sermons, reflecting on case studies from their own ministry contexts and crafting statements of faith in light of what they were learning.

The course won a Grawemeyer award for excellence in teaching. But, the real prize was the transformation of the students *and* the professors, as they will tell you to this very day.

Recently I asked one of the students from this class what it meant to him. This student, incidentally, is now one of our professors at Louisville Seminary, Brad Wigger. He says that what he learned in that course thirty years ago has stayed with him to this day. Brad said, "I can't think about evil and suffering without thinking about the case studies, the sermons, the situations the students brought to class. Their voices are still present in me: the professors, students and others who suffered."

Burton Cooper's subsequent book, *Why? God,* owed a great deal to this course, as he brought his own personal experience of suffering into the critical study, and invited a group of students to learn with him.[13] When I asked Craig Dykstra about this course, the word he used to characterize its effect on him was "transformative."

Most of us who have been through theological education could relate our own stories of transformation. We could all bear witness to moments in an experience of Clinical Pastoral Education or Theological Field Education when a wise supervisor deftly guided us to see something that we had studiously avoided, but which, if it had been left untouched, might have

festered into soul sickness—a condition that could have infected and undermined our ministry in years to come. We could tell of moments of critical analysis in a therapeutic practicum or in spiritual direction, when secrets we kept (even from ourselves) were revealed, and we were healed through confession and an assurance of pardon from unexpected sources. We could recall lectures, seminars, or study groups when Greek verbs, or ecumenical councils, or historical-critical studies of ancient texts yielded more than information, when we found ourselves standing in the presence of the God of the ages, forgiven and judged and called to serve.

The magic of theological education does not turn base metals into gold. It does something much more crucial. Through the wonder of theological education we are ushered into a deeper encounter with the world around us, a world that God creates and holds in existence. We are taught to acquire that humility and awe, that reverence toward God and respect of others that are irreplaceable and essential attributes of ministry.

In the journey of theological education, seminaries are not terminals, they are launching pads. That is why the final event of our degree program is called commencement. The adventure of theological education is intended to prepare us to serve intelligently and faithfully. To be theologically well-educated is not to become bookish, but to become wise.

What happens in theological schools has the potential to change the world for all time. Amid silence, voices, and sighs; in the glow of computer monitors in the library and candles in the sanctuary; in ministry settings in the midst of the city, or down a country lane; over meals in the cafeteria, around tables in our homes—in short, wherever “classrooms” happen, here we touch the core of life, here we touch God, and together, here we are transformed through the renewing of our minds.

Theological education is as unnecessary as ministry. Nothing hangs on it—except the quality of our faith and our life together as a people of God.

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Endnotes:

[1]Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 1-4.

[2]*Ibid.*, 2-4.

[3]James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, & Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Robert William Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening and the Future of Egalitarianism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000).

[4]Daniel O. Aleshire, *Earthen Vessels: Hopeful Reflections on the Work and Future of Theological Schools* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 129.

[5]Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra, *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 11.

[6]Lillian Daniel and Martin B. Coverhaver, *This Odd and Wondrous Calling: The Public and Private Lives of Two Ministers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 16.

[7]Clarence Jordan, *The Substance of Faith,* ed. Dallas Lee (New York: Association Press, 1972), 42.

[8]José Miguez Bonino, *Room to be People,* trans. Vicky Leach (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 9-10.

[9]Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1990).

[10]Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), xiii-xv.

[11]W. Robert Connor, "The Right Time and Place for Big Questions," *Chronicle of Higher Education,* June 9, 2006, B8.

[12]Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 2007), 3.

[13]Burton Z Cooper, Why, God? (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988).