



Foreword to Images of Leadership: *Monograph on Social Responsibility*¹

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What is being taught about social responsibility within Christian theological education worldwide? This monograph provides an encouraging answer. The data indicate an upsurge of interest in social responsibility, the sector of historical Christian ethics which has been neglected, even rejected, in many places for several decades.

The data also raise some serious questions. The unevenness of attention to the practical realm of social action across the institutions represented in the study, and the abstractness of some of the reported curricular activities makes one wonder if theological education in *any* part of the world has yet come to grips with the issue on a large scale. To lead within the church implies a community leadership responsibility; to lead well, in terms of ethical values, requires the development of skills and insights, not just good intentions. Valid curriculum must be concerned with practical skills, not just pious expectations.

The concern of this monograph is for theological education as it exists today: institutions have been established and charged with responsibility for equipping leaders within the church. The issue at hand is whether or not the images of *leading* which are implicit and explicit in these institutions are adequately biblical. This issue is pressing today because of the increased consciousness of a needy world in which the church of Jesus Christ stands as servant of the Lord of redemption, offering the appropriate equivalents of "a cup of cold water." What does it mean to be a leader in the community of faith? Have the people who assume the roles and tasks of leading the church been nurtured in the whole of the gospel of Jesus Christ or rather in some meager verbal and propositional excerpts? Are they (one fears even to ask) more able to argue than to live?

Those who hire personnel for the staffing and leading of community development work are aware that Christian applicants come in two forms, neither of which is ideal. Candidates whose theological education is "sound" commonly lack practical expertise; those who have adequate technical training and practical expertise typically lack the coherent theology to undergird their skills. As human needs in the broken world become increasingly acute and the demand for appropriate Christian response increases, one question dominates: from what source will adequately educated and well-rounded Christians emerge to meet the needs? The time has come for the academic communities that serve the church to pay attention.

Academic theological education has been given the major responsibility for equipping leaders in the church. This investment is not free of hazards. No educational institutions were established by Jesus Christ during the incarnation sojourn. Among the priorities that motivated the early church, formal education was given no particular place. One can read the entirety of the New Testament without the slightest hint of formal theological schools in the service of church. Further, if the listed marks of

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eligibility for service as elders and deacons are taken at face value, there is only one possible allusion to anything academic: “able to teach” (1 Timothy 3: 2). The Scripture suggests that there are several contexts of teaching more important than formal theological education. Jesus Christ said, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” Those who are the people of this *Way* are expected also to be informed and motivated by the *Truth* to such an extent that *Life* is affected in all its aspects. Of particular interest is the leader’s readiness and competency to minister to the *whole person in functional communities*.

In the industrialized nations, governments have adopted many of the functions and forms of social support which originated within the Western churches. Today the churches in these nations are inclined to overlook the social needs of their communities for the simple reason that secular agencies and governments are supposedly now taking care these matters. (One might well ask just how effectively and compassionately such needs are actually being met.) But in the lives of the majority of the people of the world, whatever good is done within their communities in times of need and to bind up the wounds of physical and social calamity, it is done within the community itself. The church of Jesus Christ dare not be irrelevant; witness of the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ is at its strongest in the context of compassionate response to human need.

What follows in this monograph is an encouraging collection of ideas—a virtual directory of who-is-doing-what. Thanks to the foresight of those who carried out the surveys and field inquiries, the reader is provided with lists of the books and other instructional resources being used in the curricular efforts reported. The whole project has been carefully dedicated to the proposition that those who lead the people of God must be informed and skilled in matters of church’s outreach to the world in ministries of helps and relief. Preaching the love of Jesus Christ is far more than a matter of words.