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Trustees, faculty, administration, and staff. Former trustees, faculty, administration, and staff. Family. Personal friends and friends of PTS. Members of the Tulsa community. Colleagues in ministry.

Why do you do what you do? There is a website: [www.wdydyd.com](http://www.wdydyd.com). On that site, individuals hold up posters, write on the wall behind them, put it the answer on a t-shirt, and then explain a little more their answer to one of life's most important questions. The site's creator began that project after years of teaching in a business school. In his teaching he found that very few of his students were asking that question. He figured that, if they did not address the question in school, it was unlikely they would once they graduated. So, he pushed: why do you do what you do?

*Why do we do what we do?* This is an important question for Phillips Theological Seminary, and nearly all seminaries, at this time in history. We are experiencing major stresses in theological education, stresses causing not surface tensions but structural cracks. The stress is caused by the global economy, yes, but not only the economy. The stress is caused also by the forty year slide in numbers in mainline congregations. Most mainline congregations are smaller than they were forty years ago. As congregations have aged, the fewer dollars they have they've kept closer to home. That shift meant seminaries rely more today than we did forty years ago on individuals, endowments, and students willing to either pay as they go or who accumulate lots of debt.

The decline in numbers in the mainline is a significant stress factor but it is not the most significant. The second greatest stress for theological education is the resurgence of a dilemma that has haunted Protestantism in the U.S. for all of the 200 years seminaries have existed: shall clergy be counted among the educated professions, or are calling and character sufficient? The answer to the question of should clergy should be an educated profession is less clearly positive than it has been in five decades.

But the most powerful stress for those of us who care about graduate seminary education is expressed in this question: Do faithful Christian thought and practice require an *educated church*? My answer is, yes.

I do what I do, and PTS does what we do, in service of educated Christians for an educated church. Seminaries have never existed for the sake of an educated clergy. We were called into being and will be sustained only because *Jesus deserves to be represented by educated churches*; and seminaries are a means to that end.

What does PTS do in order to contribute to an educated church? There are three activities I want you to know about us. I support and will support these core activities for as long as I am given the humbling privilege and responsibility of serving as president.

1. PTS provides the scholars and the place to engage in dangerous conversations without fear.
  2. PTS educates Christian leaders because calling and character are necessary but not sufficient.
  3. PTS promote the association between Christianity and intelligence, compassion, and justice; and do all that is in our power to break the association of Christianity with ignorance, violence, and vengeance.
1. PTS provides the scholars and the place to engage in dangerous conversations without fear.

If I look for the roots of why I thought I might have a call to the ministry, I turn to the Bible. I have always had questions about the Bible; and I have always cared to find the answers. When I was a child, my dad took me to Sunday School classes at Brookfield Methodist Church. I paid attention in class—which always made me a Teacher’s Pet. When I reached adolescence, I asked questions of the youth group leaders, an older couple who cared for us deeply and who allowed me to ask anything, even when they told me that my questions made them uncomfortable.

While asking questions about the Bible, I did not know I was poking my finger into the socket of two of the greatest dangers the world has ever known—interpreting the Bible and claiming to follow Jesus.

Based on the Bible, the church in history *has* warred, burned, hanged, enslaved, and condemned. I should say, based on the Bible, the church *is* warring, burning, hanging, enslaving and condemning (if you keep up at all with the church worldwide, not only what is being doing in and through U.S. Christians but also in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, you’ll know that the “atrocities” done in the name of biblical authority continue). Based on the Bible, the church in history *has* waged peace, provided sanctuary, liberated, and forgiven. Yes, based on Bible, the church *is* waging peace, providing sanctuary, liberating and forgiving.

How we read the Bible matters a lot. One of my college professors told us about listening to a radio preacher rail against the then famous theologian, Karl Barth. The preacher exclaimed, “I can’t wait for the day when God reaches down and rips the jawbone out of Karl Barth’s mouth and rips the cartilage out of his knees and Barth falls down and worships the One True God.” But we all worship the same God and read the same Bible, right?

No, we don’t.

There may be no action more defining for Protestants than reading the Bible. How should Christians read the Bible? When Protestants founded educational institutions, whether Sunday Schools, institutes, or colleges, high on the list for WHY was to help Christians read the Bible well, which meant shaping individual and congregational belief and practice

according to scripture. One of the most prominent reasons seminaries were founded was to teach clergy to teach Christians how to read the Bible.

But if Protestantism has been defined by Bible-reading, we must also claim our identity as those who fight about the right reading of the Bible. We Protestants have lived by a Reformation principle: no earthly human mediates between me and God. Everyone should read and know the Bible. But should everyone interpret the Bible solo, apart from a community of interpreters? The Reformers' answer was No. Apart from scholars? No. Me and my Jesus. Me and my Bible. Me and my Jesus and my Bible and Wikipedia. No.

The Bible needs to be read with guidance, with others, with scholars. I am not implying that seminary professors should be to the church as the wizard was to the citizens of the Emerald City in the Wizard of Oz. Remember the scene when the Wicked Witch is writing in the sky, "Surrender Dorothy"? "What does it mean?," the citizens cried. "Ask the Wizard, he will know." And they all rush to the great doors to consult their local oracle. This is not the role of the seminary professor! But neither should the circle of our reading sacred texts exclude the last 200 years of biblical studies—scholarship that has cut out the support for Christians burning witches and heretics, crusading against infidels and Eastern Christians, enslaving Black Africans, oppressing ethnic minorities, exterminating Native peoples, and condemning every form of "Others." And that scholarship of the last 200 years has been a powerful force toward evolving a Christianity that champions compassion, peace, liberation, and democracy, a Christianity that offers repentance for past evil and resistance to current injustice.

It is often said that the Bible *speaks*, as in "The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it." But such statements hide our responsibility, our action. Unless we are zombies, or God is a vampire who "glamours" us into submission, we *interpret* whatever it is we are hearing. Every person, and every congregation, interprets the Bible. The question is, whom have you invited into your circle of interpretation? Our lives, the lives of many others in our world, and the lives of future generations really depend upon how we interpret. Faithful Christian thought and practice surely require a community of interpreters informed by scholarship and embracing their ethical responsibility when they interpret.

There is no more dangerous conversation the church can have than a conversation about the Bible, except perhaps when we talk about Jesus. Every Christian congregation makes the following claim, either explicitly or implicitly. Every Christian congregation claims to be following Jesus. If the claim is implicit rather than spoken, it is implied in the use of the word Christian, by the cross in the worship space, and by celebrating Christmas and Easter. Every Christian congregation claims to be following Jesus. Said differently, every Christian congregation shows a face of Jesus to its world. The dying congregation that has lost its way still is showing some kind of Jesus to the world. The megachurch with its ten video locations is showing a Jesus to the world. The church that decided to stay in its changing neighborhood to welcome the immigrants who do not look like themselves allege to show a Jesus. Congregations that encourage an eye for an eye against abortion doctors and those that hold vigils after his death and pray for those who killed him also allege to show Jesus to the world, to do what Jesus would do.

As it is with the Bible, so it is with Jesus. In the name of Jesus, congregations condemn homosexuals and bless the union of homosexuals. In the name of Jesus, churches ordain women to ministry and deny women's ordination. In the name of Jesus, Christians undergird one nation's claim of God's special favor *and* declare citizenship open to a transnational realm bounded only by God's universal love.

Can you see how questions about the Bible and Jesus are dangerous questions, and why the church needs a space to wrestle with those questions without fear, with scholarship, and with scholars? In a seminary such as PTS, we create a space, assemble the scholarship, and recruit the student body on the behalf of the church to deal with these life and death questions. We believe that our lives, and the lives of the people we touch and influence, really do depend on the answers.

2. PTS educates Christian leaders because calling and character are necessary but not sufficient.

I don't think anyone would debate the claim that the church needs educated leaders. The debates are regarding what is the content of that education and who is authorized and equipped to deliver it. Ever since the Great Awakening of the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, and then the Second Great Awakening of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, revivalism has been a significant part of Christianity in America. Revivalism put an emphasis on clergy possessing a distinctive emotional and spiritual conversion experience as never before in Christian history. A conversion experience that some Christians came to require first for the clergy and then for all authentic Christian laity. The success of spirit-born preachers, often with no formal education, in gathering congregations and raising funds was remarkable. In fact, some critics claimed an inverse relationship between formal education and revivalistic success. The greater the education, the slimmer the chances the preacher would be useful to God's soul-harvest.

By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Protestant church leaders began to argue about how best to educate clergy. Some church leaders argued for apprenticeship and guided reading. Ride or reside with seasoned pastors, learn how to minister through watching and guidance of a mentor, and read divinity with that mentor and his companions. Other leaders argued that the results of the "Bush College" education were disappointing. Eliza Garrett, whose funds helped start the Methodist seminary that bears her name, wished pastors who knew how to warm hearts also knew how to speak the English language without mangling it.

One 19<sup>th</sup> century supporter of seminary education argued we should reflect on how doctors and lawyers are educated. No man, he wrote, tells a son who wants to be a lawyer, "It is good you have a calling to the law, Son. Go, start practicing the law." Nor, if he had a son who would be a doctor, would he say to his son, "Son, that is wonderful, go, pick up a scalpel and begin to practice medicine." Rather, the father would say, "Son, it is wonderful that you have such a calling. Now, go get the education in order that you can fulfill the calling."

Some version of the "character and calling are sufficient" stance has been with us for a long time, with the implication that the Holy Spirit will provide the knowledge. As I said at

the outset, seminaries today are stressed. The stress is financial, yes. At PTS, we have been particularly blessed in the last decade to have the transformative support of the Cadieuxs. We all shudder to think where we would be with you, Chester and Debbie, and without your family. Thank you for your life-giving support. We also have hundreds of other good friends. I am glad for this moment to speak live to a goodly portion of PTS's cloud of witnesses. Many have you have been faithful supporters and have given generous and timely gifts. Between the Cadieuxs and you, PTS has, thus far, been given refuge from the worst of the economy. But conditions can change quickly. We cannot take for granted the "calling and character and a little training" argument won't seduce the churches into thinking that higher education for ministry is a luxury we can't afford—or, in fact, one we don't want to afford. As congregations have aged, without renewal in terms of age or any other version of "newcomer," the temptation grows to say calling and character are plenty: God will supply the rest.

Would you allow a doctor with good character, a calling, no certified education, and a scalpel to perform surgery on you? Would you allow a minister with good character, a calling, and no certified education interpret for you how to read that Bible, who Jesus is, and what it means to follow him? In my opinion, we are talking about nearly equal dangers.

3. PTS promotes the association between Christianity and intelligence, compassion, and justice; and we do all that is in our power to break the association of Christianity with ignorance, violence, and vengeance.

In today's hostile political divide in the U.S., one of the elements that deeply troubles me is that, in the national mindset, Christianity has become associated with ignorance, violence, and vengeance. Take a look at the surveys on what that fastest growing segment of religious preference in the U.S. population thinks about Christianity. I am speaking of the fifteen percent of the country that professes no religion, many adamantly so. They hate what they perceive to be a religion of the ignorant. They hate the association between religion and violence. And they hate what they see as the penchant of the religious to retaliate or seek vengeance. Perhaps there is at least one young adult in your home or family who will not attend church or has rejected Christianity as a religion because of the associations between Christianity, ignorance, violence, and vengeance.

Well, I reject the expressions of Christianity that aid and comfort those who do violence in Jesus' name. As far as I can speak for all my colleagues on the faculty, administration, and staff at PTS, so do we. How about the rest of you?

When did ignorance become a Christian virtue? How did we get to the place where Christianity—the progenitor of ancient cathedral schools, monasteries that kept learning alive for hundreds of years while the secular world imploded, great universities, hundreds of colleges, and scores of seminaries—how did we get to the place where Christians are perceived by younger American's as ignorant? Christianity: one of the philosophical contributors to modern science; Christianity, which had so much to do with developing law in the Western world, Christianity which gave the world the Benedictines and Jesuits, the Niebuhrs, and the Luthers—the 16<sup>th</sup> century one and his namesake in 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S, and

Catherine of Siena and Ruether of Evanston and Claremont. Yet, in the popular mind, especially among younger people, Christianity is a force for ignorance, anti-science, and small-mindedness.

On the association between Christianity and violence, Christianity's critics in every age have too many examples to give. Several religions in our day have been used to enthrone so much violence that we religious people really do have some explaining to do. And, while words such as truth, reconciliation, and forgiveness have enriched the public conversations in places such as Bosnia and South Africa in recent years, not so in the U.S. In the U.S., whether we are talking about common crimes or terrorist atrocities, the loudest public, and often Christian, voices have argued for an eye-for-an-eye vengeance.

Christians have not helped ourselves by creating multiple cardboard Jesuses. Jesus as the late Billy Mays of moral causes, Jesus the pitchman, the spokesman for whatever we want to do, a sort of press secretary for this Christian cause or that Christian cause. Pitchman Jesus can be and has been employed by partisans of all points of view. Jesus in recent history has been warrior and feminist, gay and cheerleader for those who shun "sinful" gay people, community-organizing advocate for the poor and giver of the great material wealth that God wants us to have.

Christians always need to resist the temptation to turn Jesus into a pitchman. Let's go back to those sometimes dangerous conversations about the Bible and about Jesus. For the last 200 years, a community of scholars has tried to disentangle the first century Jesus from contemporary usage of Jesus where he is used to promote whatever we wanted to do but feel better about doing it if we could have Jesus on our side. Seminary scholarship at a seminary such as Phillips is a part of this conversation, a conversation that takes the question, "What would Jesus do?" very seriously. But we can't answer the contemporary question with integrity unless we also do our homework on the question, "What did Jesus do?"

One of the disappointments of present-day Christianity is how doctrine often divides Christians. Many Christians will not talk, study, or work together if they cannot agree on the meaning of Jesus' divinity, what happens when we receive communion, or the afterlife. But I would hope that there are Christians who, although divided by theology, still might agree that intelligence, compassion, and justice are Jesus-virtues and should be fundamental Christian virtues. If we could agree that intelligence, compassion, and justice define the religion of Jesus, then we have a great deal to talk about together, and shared work to do in Jesus' name, even when we fail each other's doctrinal litmus tests.

In today's world, PTS and many of our graduates and supporters are contesting against powerful forces regarding what it means to read the Bible, what it means to follow Jesus. There are *not* only two sides: my side and the wrong side. God is bigger than any of our sides. Moreover, scholars who take the historical record very seriously come out in different places regarding what Jesus did, and offer multiple "therefores" regarding what it means to follow Jesus today. But can we agree God needs congregations, schools, and courageous individuals who will do all in their power to promote the way of Jesus as a way of intelligence, compassion, and justice?

If you read PTS's mission statement, you'd see this line:

One single aim dominates [our] educational programs: to help the church make the Christian faith effective in human life and society through a competent, educated ministry.

In order for the faith to be effective in human life and society, we educate women and men, clergy, clergy candidates, and laity.

- We believe the Christian faith can be made more effective by initiating students into conversations about the Bible and about Jesus—conversations that congregations need but seldom conduct on their own.
- We believe the Christian faith is made more effective when students add learning to their character and their calling.
- And we believe our advocacy for a Christianity that is intelligent, compassionate, and justice-oriented helps the church to be faithful to its mission: to work with God to repair the world.

Why do we do what we do? Now I include you all in the we. PTS is not simply the employees, or the employees and the current trustees and the current students. Phillips Theological Seminary includes all of you here, plus students, plus the thousands of alums, donors, Christians ministered to by PTS alums, and members of other communities of faith, especially friends here in Tulsa.

We, PTS, foster conversations about the Bible and Jesus, educate leaders, and promote the way of Jesus marked by intelligence, compassion, and justice. And we do this because we want to help the church make the Christian faith, so understood, an effective force for good in our world.

*Jesus deserves to be represented by educated churches;* and that is why we do what we do.