

# What is Theological Education?

Remarks by Dr. Charles Jackson, Lecturer, given at the Convocation and Dedication of Africa Reformation Theological Seminary, February 25, 2017

One dictionary says of theological education,

institutions organized by churches and church people to prepare men for church leadership.

Another mentions that theological education is about professional and academic training for the ministry.

In the end I would fall back to a phrase from the middle ages, that theological education is to know God and to make him known.

## **To know God and to make him known.**

This phrase first came to me when studying the early middle ages and discovering that the ruler Charlemagne, who is considered the father of Europe, when he wanted to reform the educational efforts of the church called on a man named Alcuin of York. In my reading I discovered a phrase that could act as something of a summary of theological education and for this matter Christian education in general. The phrase that captured the heart of theological education was this

To know God and to make him known.

Perhaps the insight or help that this phrase holds for us may well be contained in the word “know”. I think today when people speak of knowing something from an educational effort they probably mean that they took a test, passed the test and got a good grade.

In the early middle ages the church used the word know to mean something more. They were still using it closer to the biblical idea of knowing which meant an intimate knowledge. Especially the idea that the things you put into your head for a test would also be connected to your heart – the things you knew were the things you lived. To know something with your head also meant that you could do it with your hands and life.

In fact, sometimes the Latin word for “know”, cogito, was used interchangeably with the Greek word, pistuo, which would be translated, I believe, I trust, I have faith in. The head and the heart were expected to be connected.

So while we want the graduates of this school to know books, languages, theology and history, we want them to know God intimately. To know God and to make him known is related to the idea even of knowing and loving.

Since God is the primary subject in theological education we want our students to know him, which ultimately means to LOVE him.

The heart of theological education is love of God. To know God and to make him known. This means that every book you read, every class you pass, and every degree that is granted from this school should carry with it a deep love for God.

The second part comes naturally – to make him known. This means that theological education trains men and women to love God and because they know and love him they might be the kind of people whose love is so deep, so rich that they overflow with it to others in the church and the world. [To know God is to know Christ and to make God known is to advance the gospel of Christ and His grace in the world.]

There is a dynamic that flows naturally from those who love God – like rivers of living water, so the love of God may flow from this institution in the life of every student.

John 17:

<sup>25</sup> O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup> I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Jn 17:25-26). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.