
Quarterly Bulletin of the Asia Missions Association *published by*
the East-West Center for Missions Research & Development

Transformational Theological Education for the Glory of God

Caleb Davison

God's people need Scripturally grounded theological education more than ever. With the explosion of information, social media and channels, there is a dramatic rise in competing narratives, not to mention the older alternative worldviews of atheism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Animism. The world is accessing more information about trends and philosophies, but that does not naturally lead to more understanding of Yahweh. If anything, there seems to be confusion, deconstruction, deception and apostasy in the Church.

Despite the need for theological education, some institutions are struggling. Christianity Today said, "Many seminaries are facing declining enrollments with the declining birthrates and increased secularization in the US... Evangelical seminaries are also grappling with the tensions and divisions within evangelicalism."¹ There have been many helpful suggestions to change the method and accessibility of theological education. James Emery White, former seminary president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary suggests, "there are things seminaries can do to recapture the attention of students and the trust of the churches who send them."²

Beyond structures and strategies, what can the Church do to reinvigorate theological education? First and foremost, I believe the Church needs to recover a fresh vision for the purpose of theological education, which is the study and discovery of our glorious God. Theological education must find its role in that exciting purpose to help reconcile all things through Christ (Colossians 1:20). Therefore, theological education is not boring research about an ancient historical figure. It is the thrilling discovery of a magnificent and wonderful God and Jesus is at the

centre of it.

Only from our union with Christ flows love, power, and wisdom that holistically transforms us to engage our increasingly complex world. For that purpose, theological education needs new life, grounded with a vision to transform hearts, heart, and hands through God's words. To begin to reignite that passion, let's examine how theological education changes us and glorifies our Creator.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE HEAD: A VISION OF GOD'S GLORY

Making God's glory the centre of theological education is not about adding more classes on the subject. It is not just a topical study, though that has a place. What I am advocating is far deeper. It must

CONTENTS

- 1 Transformational Theological Education for the Glory of God**
Caleb Davison
- 6 Blockchain Missiology**
Enoch Wan & Phillip Metzger
- 18 Growing Impact of Orality in a Digit-Oral Era**
Charles Madinger
- 31 Mission Training at PTS-CAS in View of Jesus' Discipling Approach**
Laurence Gatawa
- 37 CHILDREN: The Future And The Present**
Jobs Tolentino

1. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/may/gordon-conwell-sell-campus-financial-enrollment-struggle.html>

2. <https://www.churchandculture.org/blog/2022/6/6/the-ending-of-seminaries>

be the crown jewel and joy of our study and pursuit. God's glory should motivate our study like an archaeologist searching for a great Egyptian treasure. It should cause us to cry out in wonder, "Who is like You among the gods, O Lord? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?" (Exodus 15:11). We have to begin there if we want to impact the world.

God's glory, like the sun, is meant to be central because it brings life to all who walk in the light. In fact, God's entire story is about His glory. His glory is not just a part of the greater cosmos, it is the thread that weaves through history. Without that understanding, we will miss the excitement of exploration within God's word and world. The creation of the universe and human history and everything visible can be attributed to the ongoing story of God revealing himself, culminating in the person of Christ. And, this narrative that is far larger (and better) than we perceive. Christ is the centre and we live in this story to show His unimaginable love, power, wisdom, and greatness, which are fortunately poured out on us.

Why a story? To understand someone, we need context, situations, time, and experiences together. We need to observe them in various challenges, successes. How well do you know a celebrity on television? To fully comprehend someone's character and heart, we need to talk with them, hear from them, process life with them. God's story reveals many truths about his heart, character and nature. He is not a God that remains distant. He speaks into darkness, moves in love and leads human history for His glory and the good of humanity. Jesus is proof that God wants to be actively involved. In the same way, he asks us to participate. We are not just watching his story, walk with him and co-labour in it.

If we disregard this, we may miss the connection between theological education and the glory of God. These two, knowledge of God and God's glory, are intimately tied in the Scripture. Biblical education exists so we can properly see and perceive God as He is. This leads to his honour and glory. The angels in close proximity to God endlessly cry out "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Is 6:3). Remember that these angels perceive God in a way we have not yet. They see him more fully than we and their response is complete amazement and awe. The incredible truth is that the closer we get to God, the more enamoured we are with His glory and respond in praise. The more we gaze, the more we praise! And these angels praise God for his holiness or "set apart-ness." He is unique and different from anything else and one of those differences is his wisdom and knowledge, which infinitely surpasses ours. Getting closer to an infinite God does not slow down our joyful pursuit of knowing Him, it hastens it. Let our education fuel this!

We see in Habakkuk that, "the earth will be filled

with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14). God is revealed through the expansion of the knowledge of His glory. This is key to our role as educators. This is the heart of God for the earth to be filled with increasing knowledge of God's nature, goodness and characteristics and humans are his primary vessel for that to happen. Thus, until this comes true, there is a gap in knowledge of the glory of God and we are called to help fill that gap.

He is more glorious than we could ever comprehend. Like a brilliant author who draws the reader into the narrative, God has created an environment for humanity to ponder, seek answers, and participate along the way. Why? Because he wants us to seek him and know him and the pursuit glorifies Him.

This gives new light to theological education. It is not an isolated topical study, but the foundation that gives life and purpose to all other study. It is not the pursuit of a dry arbitrary goal. It is the discovery of a personal and infinite Being. That is why the study of God, the Trinity, cannot be a one-day seminar or even a 4-year degree. It requires a lifetime of study, learning, reflection, discovery, conversations and most importantly participation.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE HEART: GOD'S GLORY RENEWS US

When we study deeper about who God is, we discover more about ourselves, for we are in His image. That is partly what the story is about- God raising up mature children after His likeness (Genesis 1:26, Malachi 2:15, Ephesians 1:5). There is some debate about the words, "image" and "likeness" in Genesis, but the core lesson is that we are endowed with His image and we are called to grow into his likeness. Adam and Eve were not born fully mature and understanding everything. They needed a garden for growth, learning, incubation, and a tree to test their hearts. Maturity takes a lifetime, maybe eternity, to grow into the likeness of God, just like it takes a child years to be like their parent. A son may be born looking like their father, but that does not guarantee he will think, live, and act like his father. That takes years of observation, walking, talking, and even wrestling. Our spiritual journey begins when the Spirit awakens us and turns us back to the Father through faith in Christ.

We were made for God's glory (Isaiah 43:7). This is not something we should shy away from. The world is desperately searching for answers about identity and the Church has those answers within the pages of Scripture. As Christians grow in understanding God's vision and our identity, we can walk better in our purpose to steward the earth and have dominion (which is intimately connected to God's image and His image in us). We become like Him in our ability to rule and reign on earth as He reigns in the heavens through power, love and wisdom.

The more we walk in alignment with humanity's purpose, the more fruit we bear. And that is the role of theological education- to make humanity fruitful! Fruit, then, is what glorifies God (John 15:8). Fruit is not abstract or unquantifiable; it is the tangible result of being connected to God and living like Him. Fruit is the manifestation of God revealing Himself in us in all areas of life. When we walk with God, we bear fruit through God. Love is the primary fruit of God in us and when we love, it demonstrates to the world that we are walking with Christ (Galatians 5:22, John 13:35).

When we study deeper about who God is, we discover more about ourselves, for we are in His image. That is partly what the story is about- God raising up mature children after His likeness (Genesis 1:26, Malachi 2:15, Ephesians 1:5).

Facts and information are necessary, but we cannot stop there. Glorifying God is not simply an intellectual pursuit. It is about fulfilling God's vision for the world, which cannot fully glorify God in a state of rebellion. And who better to reconcile that situation than the sons and daughters of God, called and re-commissioned for Genesis 1:26 fruit-bearing?

God wants us to participate in this story, not just watch it or tell it, because that is what manifests His pre-existing glory. Our Christian calling is to put truth into action and bear fruit in God's story. Fruit, the outflow of our inward transformation, jumps out of the pages of God's story and lasts forever as a blessing for the Story Teller. That is why Jesus says fruit is eternal (John 15:16). Fruit goes beyond the pages of this life.

Education and training exist to fuel fruitfulness. This is the same calling of a leader to equip saints for good works, or fruits (Ephesians 4:12). We cannot dismiss the role of teaching to prepare saints for good works and then do everything in our power to ensure fruitfulness. So educators must teach the mind, touch the heart, and target hands.

If we are in God's great story, teachers and educators need to go beyond facts and paint a picture of the future based on what is revealed in Scripture. This future, God's desire from the beginning, is about God living with His people on earth. This is not just a fairy tale hope, this is an actual future that God has promised, which puts our wrestling hearts at ease.

In the middle of this narrative is a serious heart-level question. Are we wanting to glorify God or ourselves? This goes all the way back to the question for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It needs to

be answered in our hearts too. Will we glorify God or seek our own knowledge of good and evil? Education, teaching, and theology steps right into this question and we must unashamedly submit to God's vision of the future based on His truth revealed in the Scripture.

The answer to this question will depend on whether we see God's glory as a good thing or a threat to our glory. That is why vision casting God's glorious future is so important. Humans cannot seek both their glory and God's. Fortunately, history and Scripture affirm that God's glory is good for us. It is what we truly seek like Moses cried, "Show me your glory!" (Exodus 33:18). God's infinite glory truly satisfies our thirsty hearts and allows the world to work in perfect harmony. If God is like the sun, then the light is His glory that brings life and transformation to all who walk in it.

TRANSFORMATION OF HANDS: BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Now, the question is, can teachers help bring transformation outside the classroom? As the saying goes, you can lead a horse to water but you cannot make it drink. God supplies the water that transforms people and we cannot force people to drink what we teach. However, there are ways to make the water attractive! Think about a grocery store with many options for bottled water. The content may be the same and yet people are drawn to pick only one bottle. In that sense, educators can help with the packaging to make sure students continue to drink from God's word.

Transformation of our hands comes when people put God's word into practice. Look at Jesus' words at the Sermon on the Mount. He commands his listeners to put into practice what they heard and whoever does not put his words into practice are like a house without a firm foundation (Matthew 7:26). Thus, theological students must learn to apply the truths they learn. This comes by faith. Satan knows much about God, but does not respond in faith. The Pharisees are another example of those who knew and studied the Scripture but failed to come to Christ for salvation (John 5:39).

The truth is like fuel. It is meant to be used. Like in a car, unused fuel is wasted. It only weighs down the vehicle. Fuel is made to be used to move the car, and then more fuel can be added. Similarly, Biblical information is meant to be used and education is meant to be lived out and put into practice, so that we can be filled again. That is why investing time and truth into unresponsive students is a poor strategy. We should be like the Apostle Paul, teach those who have been faithful with what they have already learned (2 Timothy 2:2).

To that end, there are several Biblical strategies for theological education that centre around God's glory to bring true transformation of head, heart, and hands.

1. RELATIONAL EDUCATION

If what we have said so far is true, then the context of learning matters and how we fruitfully pursue knowledge. God did not simply give humans the Bible and ask us to study it and come back and take an exam when we are ready to be like him. God invites us into a story (full of ups and downs and unexpected turns) that increases our experiential knowledge and builds our character along the way. Knowledge of God is central to that journey.

Educators must first see and behold the glory of God. They must stand in awe of it. They must love it, seek it, and long for it. They must make it tangible in their lives and help others to see the same. What we see in the Scripture is that glorification happens in relationship, when one is within proximity of another. When one beholds another's glory, Jesus wants to be glorified by the Father in the presence of his people (17:24). And, Jesus glorified the Father through his life and obedience (17:6). Jesus is glorified by his people (17:10) and Jesus has given his glory to his people (17:22). It is all very relational.

From the beginning, God said it is not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). The same is true today and one implication is that fellowship is a tool to glorify God. It is hard to discover truth in isolation. Relationship is necessary for the full revelation of God. Beholders share with each other, learn from one another, and rejoice when they discover more about God.

When people get together, students and teachers get to know each other. It is not just about knowing the information; it is about knowing how others perceive that information that helps us grow and persuades us about the validity of the information. Information can be discussed, challenged, and then go deeper. Not only is this kind of education more effective, it is exciting and inviting. The world is longing for relationship, especially after the years of relational drought during COVID. Relational learning leads to conversations and conversations typically tend to be practical.

2. PRACTICAL CONVERSATIONS

Theory has a necessary place, but eventually education needs to drift into the practical question of, "now what?" Practical does not mean prescriptive. It does not mean a formula for right actions and success. Practical means applicable to the real world and specifically the situations that students are facing. This is not always easy. Practical conversations require time and discovery of nuanced situations.

Practical is necessary because at some point truth must transfer into action. Jesus' Great Commission commands us to teach people to obey (or observe) all of his words (Matthew 28:20). The aim is not for everyone to know Jesus' words. The goal is a world full of fruitful people who glorify God in every

aspect of their life. God requires teaching for practical outcomes and so should we!

One way to combine deep truths and practical application is through storytelling. Jesus did this masterfully through parables. Stories are naturally relatable, but can be profound when they hold deeper truths.

3. EXPERIENTIAL PROGRAMS

Experiential learning goes beyond the classroom. This may seem outside the scope of education, but remember that education is meant to be holistic, for head, heart and hands. To do this, educators can require that the program include activities. For some ministries, they require students to do their own extracurricular work like discipling Christians, sharing the gospel or planting churches. The ministry that I serve with, Leadership International, is helping Bible students to share the gospel, provide relief, and serve vulnerable women and children. That is Biblical leadership in action. Depending on the education and program, there are various options. It is more than acceptable to require students to put their learning into action and then reflect and share. That is exactly what Jesus did!

This fits into God's design for good works to shine before others and glorify our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16). When students have an opportunity to do this, they taste the delight of "truth in action" and they will likely want to keep going. There is joy when we obey God's words (John 15:10-11). Joy comes from communion with Christ in his mission, when we walk in his steps according to his desires. Obedience naturally draws us closer to Christ, the source of our joy. Joy is relational and primarily comes from intimacy with God. People are wired to seek joy and it can be a powerful motivator for people to go out of their comfort zone to obey God. For example, the Apostle Paul said that it was the joy before Christ that led him to the cross (Hebrews 12:2).

Some learners tend to be more inward and intellectual. Doing anything beyond the class may seem foreign. Like a static waterwheel, it takes a lot to get moving again. But once that momentum begins, it becomes a lot easier. Obedience is a lifestyle that needs to be observed and followed. Sometimes we need to see it, hear stories and taste it before they begin obeying. Educators can help in that space by reminding students about their greater purpose of glorifying God, which comes from our fruits and good deeds (Matthew 5:16), not degrees and positions.

4. COMPREHENSIVE CONTENT

Biblical education needs to cover Genesis 1 until Revelation 22. Sometimes education focuses too much on certain details and neglects the grand narrative. If a Bible student becomes an expert on the laws in Leviticus but fails to understand how they relate to

the story of God’s redemption, they have missed the point. Educators must be excellent vision casters for God’s glorious nature, work and plans. Then students will be more likely to register details properly when within the broader framework.

Comprehensive content is crucial because God is meant to be glorified in the whole earth (Habakkuk 2:14), and subsequently in all areas of life and culture. Think about the scope of the practical topics Jesus taught about like money, marriage, taxes, and prayer. When education is comprehensive, it helps students to see how theology affects all of life. Our understanding of God does not just impact church services. It impacts governments, economics, business, and families. When educators broaden their scope of theological education, as well as depth, it accurately portrays the significance that theology is meant to have in all of life. And that glorifies the God whom we seek to study and serve.

CONCLUSION

As God’s image bearers, humans were created to behold God’s glory and reveal it. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” Transformation comes when we behold God’s glory together and depend on the Spirit to transform our head, heart, and hands. Theological educators are uniquely called to help take the blinds off of students so they can behold what has been there all along and live out their faith. For this end, let us make every effort to plan and practice theological education that is relational, practical, experiential and comprehensive. That is how Christ taught his disciples and we too can experience transformational impact as we “declare his glory among the nations” (1 Chronicles 16:23-25)!



Caleb J. Davison
caleb@leadershipintl.org

CJ Davison lives with his wonderful wife and 4 children in the UK. His greatest joy has been walking with God for 25 years. His passion is to equip Christ-like leaders for Gods mission and serves as the International Director for Leadership International (www.leadershipintl.org), helping to establish locally run Biblical leadership training centres. He is also the author of Missional Friendship: Jesus’ Design for Fruitful Life and Ministry.

OUR MINISTRIES



ERRATUM:

Correction must be made regarding the author of the National Report on Vietnam published on Asian Missions Advance Fall/October Issue released as E-Journal on October 15, 2023. The author must be Rev. Ho Nguyen Kha who is currently the Commissioner of the Executive Board of The Evangelical Church of Vietnam and the Senior-pastor of The Soc Trang Evangelical Church.