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For the Board of Trustees
Andover Newton Theological School
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Trustees of the Dream

We live in a time of wars and rumors of wars.

Pandemic dis/ease, famine, brutality, terrorism, torture, tyranny, ecological crisis make headline news. Military/ industrial machinery and prison/industrial machinery grind up lives, and a consumer culture drives too many people to worship at necro/phillic alters of material acquisition located in bright shiny cathedrals of capitalistic excess. We worship the idols of dead stuff at the church of the mall. We live in a society that is soul hungry and spiritually thirsty for something to make us whole, and we all too often find our peace, we find a temporary artificial peace in some drug, legally prescribed or not. And the balls keep being pitched, hit, passed, caught, carried, kicked, dribbled, dunked, served, returned, teed-up, driven, putted. The hockey puck slides across the ice. In the movie theaters, Jason Bourne chases and is chased across identity, supremacy, and ultimatum. Queen Elizabeth the First lives again; Jesse James dies again while rappers rap and Sting sings: “there’s no religion but sex and music, sound and dancing, line and color; there’s no religion but sacred trance, endless ocean, moon and stars, time and motion; no religion just tribal scars; no religion but the joys of rhythm, the rites of spring; no religion in the paths of hate, no prayer but the one I sing”ⁱ Mick Jagger still can’t get no satisfaction, country singers sing the blues, Tony Bennett croons, and Queen Latifah sings the great American songbook. All the while, comedians keep us laughing at the bad news.

How do we hear the still small voice of the Divine within this cacophony? Such confusion leads anyone with any sense at all to say there is no Divine. God is a delusion; God is not great. Humankind ought to evolve beyond religion and bring an end of faith because faith is more trouble than it is worth. Witness Mother Teresa who waited for most of her life to feel the love of a God to whom she had dedicated her whole self.

What is the work of a theological project in such a world? For all of its existence up to and including this day theological education has primarily trained leaders for the church. It has taught bible, ethics, theology, history, pastoral care, the preaching and worship arts, evangelism, and leadership to people dedicated to the service of the church. It has prepared those people who are called to remind us of the sacredness of human life in all of its stages: baptism and dedication of infants, teaching little children about God in Sunday School, confirmation of teenagers, celebration of marriage, saying prayers with the sick and dying, reminding us of resurrection as we bury the dead or scatter their ashes. Theological education prepares people to minister to the sick, to prisoners, and to the poor. When it is at its best, it helps students know how to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable.

This is quite much to teach, and if theological education could do that well, it would be enough. But is it really enough? Has it been enough so far? The state of the world says no. Theological education needs to teach students the power of the dream. Is it possible to teach vision and clarity and courage? It is possible if we do not make the status quo sacred, if theology dares to deconstruct tradition, to excavate new meanings from layers and layers of past presumptions and to polish the newly discovered gems to a brilliance that catches the light in dazzling ways. Theological education, the theological school needs to give students space to do

their own thinking, to dare to be wrong about the meaning of this or that text. The creative misreading very often brings about interesting new insights. The theological school ought to provide space for students to explore their own souls, to learn themselves, to find their own styles, to write a fresh vision for themselves and for the world. Wisdom teaches us that where there is no vision, the people perish. Thus, I say: theological education, the theological project is the work of the logic of theos. It is making a God argument that understands that God is an entity other than a blood-thirsty guy in the sky, sitting on a golden throne, counting the hairs on our heads, keeping the sparrows in the air.

God is earth, wind, fire and water, and more; God is transcendent mind, and more; God is truth, wisdom, Love incarnate in human being, and more; God is the strength to struggle, and more; God is complete, perfect, radical Love that overcomes all our fears, and more. God is obscurity and ambiguity and paradox; God is the dark space, and the blank page, the unknown, the question mark, the silence, the doubt, the mystery. Theological education ought to teach students to have the courage to doubt, to question, to live content when God is silent, to exist joyfully inside uncertainty.

Moreover, theological education ought also to expand our idea about what the church is. The church is not the church house; it is not even the communion, the community of like-minded believers. For a deeper understanding of what the church is, let us take a brief excursion into the etymology of the English word "church." Church derives from the Greek *kurios*. *Kurios* means lord. The English word lord derives from Old English *hlaford* which is *half* which mean bread plus *weard* which means guardian. Thus the root of the word lord in English takes us to the idea of the church as the guardian of the bread.

Now what does a guardian do? A guardian guards. S/he protects, and s/he escorts. For too long the church has been the place where we guard orthodoxy, whether it is a conservative orthodoxy that emphasizes personal piety and the church's priestly function of performing ritual, or whether it is a progressive orthodoxy that emphasizes social justice and the churches prophetic function of seeing to the needs of the least among us. Even when the church moves into the world, the call is usually to join us, believe as we believe, understand God the way we understand God. With such an approach, religion stops at faith. The 19th century German thinker Ludwig Feuerbach is correct when he warns that religion that stops at faith is dangerous, tribalistic, death-dealing, and misses the mark. Religion ought to move beyond faith to get to Love, a love that accepts the Other in h/er own integrity, that does not seek conformity, that finds a way to live together in supplementary relationship.

Theological education ought to teach students to be leaders that will guard the bread, understanding the bread as an element of communion that not only represents the body of Christ, but that also represents the sustenance that all human beings need to live. Its companion element is wine (grape juice for teetotal Baptists) not only represents the blood of Christ, but represents joy, a state that makes life worth living. Thus, I say: the church is any individual or any group that brings sustenance and joy into the world. Theological education ought to teach people how to escort sustenance and joy, bringing these things to hospital rooms, to court rooms, to board rooms, to the jail house and the school house, to mansions and huts, to suburb and city, to grain fields and battle fields. Theological education ought to provide the space to craft a utopian

vision and to dream dangerously. Mary McLeod Bethune and Martin Luther King Jr and Cesar Chavez were such dreamers. Dorothy Day and John Lennon dreamed radical dreams. These people and others dreamed dangerously.

T.E. Lawrence, also known as Lawrence of Arabia, wrote of dangerous dreamers:

All men dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity. But the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dreams with open eyes, to make it possible. T.E. Lawrence *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*

Theological education ought to teach students to dream dangerous daylight dreams with eyes wide open, to vision new possibilities, to write the vision, to work to turn the vision into reality.

You are trustees of theological education and of the theological project. Your immediate work is to tinker with the nuts and bolts of Andover Newton's institutional maintenance. However, in a larger sense, your work is to create the space for new possibilities. Your vision, your courage, your dangerous eyes-wide open daytime dreams will serve as an example and as an inspiration for faculty, staff and students. You are trustees of the dream, a dream of justice and peace, of sustenance and joy, flowing from this hill into a world wanting, and needing to hear a word from the Divine within the cacophony, a world dying to know faith, hope and love.

i. These lyrics are from "Send Your Love" on the Sacred Love CD released by A&M Records, October 2003.