

RELIGION ONLINE

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The Purpose of the Church and its Ministry

by [H. Richard Niebuhr, Daniel Day Williams, & James M. Gustafson](#)

H. Richard Niebuhr was Professor of Christian Theology at Yale University Divinity School. His most famous book is *Christ and Culture*. Assisting him in this project were Daniel Day Williams, Professor of Theology at Union Theological School, and James Gustafson, then on the staff of the Study of Theological Education in the U.S. and Canada.

This text was prepared for Religion Online by John C. Purdy.

SUMMARY

(ENTIRE BOOK) Supported by intensive research, Dr. Niebuhr reevaluates the role of the church in American life and its relationship to the seminary. He arrives at a fresh concept of the ministry, and restates the idea of the theological school.

Chapters

- [Forward](#)

Education in general, and not least ecclesiastical education, is subject to constant processes of deterioration and hence in need of periodic self-examination Thirty-

six seminaries have given particular help by supplying information about their development during the last twenty years through The Study of Theological Education in the United States and Canada.

- Chapter 1: The Purpose of the Church and its Ministry

At least in many parts of Christendom the quest for meaning, the revival of historic religious convictions about man's nature and destiny, about his lostness and his salvation, and the need to realize the significance of these convictions in relation to contemporary world and life views, have led to a renewal of the theological endeavor. The role of the seminary is here weighed in several relationships.

- Chapter 2: The Emerging New Conception of the Ministry

The seminary's express purpose is to educate those who will direct the affairs of church institutions, especially local churches. They tend in consequence to neglect the first function of a theological school—the exercise of the intellectual love of God and neighbor. To this imbalance we shall need to address ourselves in other connections. The definition of the minister in the modern community is faced as well as the authority of the minister and his director.

- Chapter 3: The Idea of a Theological School

Very much as local pluralistic churches and harried ministers, seminaries also have an uncertainty of purpose. The first, superficial impression is not erased by more thorough acquaintance with theological schools; many instances of self-satisfied provincialism, inert traditionalism and specious modernization tend to confirm it. But more intimate acquaintance also brings into view a second, very different aspect of the scene. Alongside conventionality, which is sometimes downright antiquarian, one encounters vitality, freshness, eagerness and devotedness among these teachers and students.

PREVIOUS

← A Wider Vision: A History of the World Congress of Faiths, 1936 – 1996

The Christian of the Future →

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