

Preface

Christian language is alive and well in the churches—and sometimes outside them as well. But deep reflection about this language is in trouble. These pages offer a radical call to pastors and laypeople to *transform* theology as we know it today. They're also a call to each reader to explore and voice his or her own Christian beliefs in such a way that they can have a *transforming* impact on both church and society.

What you are holding in your hand is not a book; it's the tip of an iceberg. Transforming Theology is a network of networks, a nationwide movement of people who are working to transform and renew the Christian church in and for the twenty-first century. Two Transforming Theology conferences are already scheduled for 2010, and we expect more to follow. The wealth of research, data, and proposals that inspired this call to action can be found at www.transformingtheology.org. Dozens of video clips, YouTube posts, podcasts, short reflections, and more await you there. More are being added every day. We encourage you not only to watch and listen, to browse and download, but also to post your own reactions, links, and resources. Become part of the movement!

What you're about to read is not just meant for solo study. It's meant to spawn group discussions in your congregation, small group, cohort, or ministry group. To this end, Tripp Fuller has composed a series of integrated questions for "Conversations Worth Having" in part 4. We strongly urge you to sit down with friends and have these conversations. If you pastor a church or run a Christian organization, we hope you'll get your entire group involved in wrestling with this book and the urgent questions it raises. Then let us know as the new insights and programs begin to emerge.

Many around us are proclaiming that the church is dead and that core Christian beliefs are irrelevant in the contemporary world. We believe they are mistaken. But Jesus' message *will* be consigned to the dustbins of history

unless we, together, begin to show why and how it remains relevant to our day. Just using Christian language and citing Scripture passages is not enough. Will you join us in transforming Christian theology, so that the power of the Christian message can again speak transformatively in the church and in the world?

The work of many brilliant theologians and committed church leaders stands behind these pages. Among many others, we thank: the Ford Foundation and Sheila Daveney, for their generous grant to support “rekindling theological imagination”; Marjorie Suchocki, my colleague and co-leader of the grant; the thirty theologians and the thirty denominational leaders who attended the two Claremont consultations in 2009 and whose wisdom gave rise to this book; the 140 bloggers (and growing) of the Transforming Theology blogging network; authors and practitioners in “emerging” churches, who get the challenges; Kate Clayton and the many other pastors whose innovative “best practices” are my inspiration; my collaborator, Tripp Fuller, who has dramatically increased the impact of the Transforming Theology movement; the band of young scholars and visionaries with whom I’ve been working at Claremont—Jeanyne Sletton, Andrea Stephenson, Deena Lin, Ashley Riordan, Eric Hall, Jeremy Fackenthal, and Benjamin Chicka; Jheri Cravens, who (once again) typed the manuscript; Michael West and his grand staff at Fortress Press, especially Susan Johnson, who saved me from a multitude of (editorial) sins; Judy and my children, who paid a price; and finally, to the One whom we seek to follow faithfully, without whose grace and self-emptying all of this would be nothing more than a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.