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of the Church

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Masters in the Making

ALFRED VON ROHR SAUER

Homiletics

Book Review

Vol. XLIII

May

Number 5

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Editorial ✠

Shape of a Seminary

With this issue we offer warm congratulations to Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, Illinois, as it celebrates its 125th anniversary. Through the years we have been linked with our sister seminary in the common task of preparing pastors for service in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Our association has been close, warm, and mutually helpful. Many of Springfield's professors graduated from our school; two of our professors come to us from their faculty. Faculty members of both schools have served with distinction as guest professors on each other's campus. In recent years we have worked together on an exchange program for both students and faculty and on common educational programs.

An anniversary tribute to our sister seminary is an appropriate occasion for some observations on the nature of a seminary. For what a seminary is should shape what a seminary does.

A seminary is a school of the church in the service of the church's message and mission. Seminaries exist because the church is on a mission to proclaim the Gospel to the world. A seminary exists to assist the church in carrying out its mission. The church's mission of Gospel proclamation is crucial for determining a seminary's shape.

The Gospel is about an event—something that happened—something that happens. Exodus—Decalog—Promised Land—Davidic kingdom—exile and return—in these events in the history of the Israelite nation God revealed Himself to men of faith as a God at work fulfilling His promise to their forefather Abraham to make of his descendants a great nation to bring blessing to the world. A humble birth in a Bethlehem stable—a life of serving love—crucifixion—resurrection—Pentecostal power—in these events God disclosed Himself to other men of faith as a God accomplishing the ultimate fulfillment of His promise to Abraham. Through Jesus Christ, God acted to bring life and salvation to the world. The Gospel is the good news of God's mighty act in our history.

The event which the Gospel announces continues to happen. The Gospel is God's power to save those who believe. Those who are baptized into Christ are crucified with Him and raised to new life with Him. The Holy Spirit is poured out on those who believe the apostolic witness. God's mighty act happens! New life, goodness, peace, love, hope, reconciliation, community are real in the lives of those for whom Christ is Lord.

A seminary is composed of people for whom the Gospel event is a reality. Students and teachers are at a seminary because Christ's redemption is real for them. With St. John they want to share what they have seen and heard so that others can know the reality of God's saving presence and power.

The Gospel and its saving work must be at the heart of seminary education. A seminary is more than an academic institution; it is not just school but also in a sense the church. With the Gospel at its center a seminary has a twofold task in relation to its students. It seeks to deepen their relationship to God, and it seeks to equip them so that they can be effective instruments for God to continue to accomplish His saving work in others.

A seminary's relation to the church's Gospel message should shape what a seminary does. It must fulfill its function as a spiritual community if it is to achieve its function as a special kind of academic community. Therefore, it must build itself on the foundation that no other man can lay, which is Jesus Christ. Its members must remind and encourage each other constantly to know nothing except Jesus Christ and Him nailed to the cross. Its members must continually share with one another the gifts which the Spirit has given them for the common good. Thus everything else a seminary does must flow from worship and witness.

Of course, as a school of the church a seminary is also an academic institution. Its work is theological education. How it does its educational work must be shaped by the special purpose it is to serve. As theology does not exist for its own sake but for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel, so theological education must be in the service of the church's mission and the church's task of service. The purpose of theological education is to equip men to function in the divinely established office of the holy ministry.

A seminary's program of theological education must take its shape from the work of the church's ministry. Two meanings of the word "ministry" must be distinguished. One meaning—admitted somewhat archaic—refers to the work of the people of God; it describes the function of all Christians as God's instruments of love and blessing to others. Possibly it would be better to use the word "service" rather than "ministry" when it has that meaning. A second, more contemporary meaning of the word "ministry" refers to the work of what the church calls "the holy ministry"; it describes the function of those called by God through the church into the office and responsibility proclaiming the Word of God and administering the sacraments.

In distinguishing the two meanings of ministry we should not separate the holy ministry from the ministry of all Christians, for the holy ministry does a work that God has given to the whole church. At the same time we should not identify or confuse the holy ministry with the ministry of all Christians, for Christ Himself established the holy ministry through the apostles.

Two important tasks distinguish the holy ministry from the ministry of all Christians. First, it is the task of the incumbent of the holy ministry to equip all of God's people for their respective ministries. The incumbents of the holy ministry have an enabling function. As stewards of God's mysteries they utilize the divine Word and the sacraments to equip God's holy people for their ministry of worship, witness, and love. A second task of the holy ministry is to represent God's people in their ministry. A pastor is not only an enabler but a leader. He preaches not only to but for the

church. He administers the sacraments in the name of the Christian community. Like a pioneer he leads the way and sets the pace for God's people in doing the work of the Lord.

Seminary education must be shaped by its function of equipping men for the work of the holy ministry. The tasks of seminary education is to help future pastors and in some cases those already in the holy ministry to be enablers and leaders of God's people. That requires a basic point of view which sees the holy ministry in its proper relation to all the people of the church. It means helping pastors develop enabling and leadership skills. It means assisting them to become more and more like orchestra leaders rather than virtuoso performers.

Because a seminary is a school of the church which prepares for the church's ministry, a seminary serving the Lutheran Church must prepare its students for the Lutheran Church's confessional commitment. Just because its pastors represent the church, the Lutheran Church expects its pastors to affirm and uphold the doctrinal content of the church's symbolical books. For those in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, confessional commitment is to the Holy Scriptures as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and practice and to the Lutheran confessional writings as a correct exposition of the Word of God.

A Lutheran seminary operates on the basis of the church's confessional position and seeks to lead its students to make the church's confessional commitment. For the seminary's curriculum that means concentrating on studies in the Scriptures and the Confessions and assuring that all courses are shaped by the church's confessional position.

For students, informed and sincere commitment to the church's confessional position should be a goal of the educational process, for one objective of seminary education for Lutherans is that a willing affirmation of the church's confessional position be developed. Such an objective requires an educational environment of openness in which an honest search for truth can take place so that through study and discussion there may issue wholehearted and unequivocal affirmation of that confession of the Gospel which expresses our unity in the church.

A seminary's particular purpose makes it a special kind of educational institution. It is both an academic institution for study and research in theology and a professional school for training in the methods and skills of ministry. Both its academic and professional functions are essential and must be kept in constant tension.

In times past the two seminaries of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod were distinguished by separating the academic and professional functions. St. Louis was the "theoretical" seminary, Springfield the "practical" seminary. Fortunately for the church's ministry, neither school limited itself to one function. Springfield engaged in the "theoretical" task of producing theologians, and St. Louis prepared its graduates for the "practical" tasks of the holy ministry.

The model for the shape of a seminary is not a circle with a single center. It is rather an ellipse with two foci. A seminary is more than classroom, library, and study. It is also field work, vicarage, and practical experience. It is very much a professional

school like a school of law or medicine. A seminary should not concentrate solely on "how to" in its educational offerings. It is not a trade school, and therefore it must engage its students in the hard intellectual work of theological study and reflection.

The twofold nature of a seminary as professional school and school for the study of theology must also determine a seminary's shape. There must be constant interrelation between classroom and field experience and between the study of theology and its practice in ministry.

Both seminaries of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod antedate the founding of the Synod itself. Throughout its 125-year history the Synod has been well served by the seminary whose anniversary we observe in this issue as well as the seminary which publishes this journal. We thank God for His grace poured out liberally on our sister seminary over the years. We are happy to join hands with her in the common task of preparing men for the Gospel ministry.

JOHN H. TIETJEN