

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

An Excellent Ministry

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Vol. XXXVI

June 1965

No. 3

Lutheranism in American Theological Education

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It is a privilege to bring greetings, very special greetings, from my institution, the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, to Concordia Seminary on this its 125th anniversary. There has been a long, intimate, and friendly relationship between these two institutions. I am not certain of the number, but I was informed that seven PhDs from the University of Chicago are on the present Concordia faculty. In addition to men holding degrees, a substantial number of the present Concordia faculty have taken courses at the University of Chicago. Hence it is understandable that the greetings I bring for this special occasion are not only personal but also institutional greetings.

This is neither the time or the place, nor am I the person, to sketch out the history of Concordia Seminary. This has been done in competent fashion by several fine scholars. This presentation is confined to a series of observations on the role of Lutheran theological education in the American context and to a brief analysis of the immediate challenge confronting Lutheran theological education and this institution within that movement.

To understand the development of Lutheran theological education it is necessary to recall that Lutheran churches and all their institutions were, until recently, immigrant churches employing foreign lan-

guages. It was inevitable that the churches and the seminaries were turned inward, primarily seeking to serve their own immigrant groups with their special customs and languages.

This was not the case with any of the English-speaking churches. All of them, in one way or another, were very much at home in the American scene, not simply because they used the American language but also because their churches came into being in a similar culture, even though it was English culture. That is, all these denominations were either rebelling, at one point or another, against the Church of England, or they were dissatisfied with one another and opposing one another. The English-speaking denominations shared a common context, and they set the pace in the American scene, for they represented a phase of English culture transformed and transported to the American scene.

The Lutherans were different. They were Germans, Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, Finns, and Dutch; so they were foreign-language churches in a strange culture and were concerned initially with ministering to their own. This was the background for Lutheran theological education, and it was a long time before American theological institutions of the Lutheran variety began to relate themselves creatively to the larger American context. It is common knowledge that many Lutheran seminaries, including the St. Louis Concordia, were founded in the

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first half of the 19th century. If they were founded so early, why has it taken them such a long time to make an impact on the American scene? It must be recalled that the entire 19th century was an immigrant century in which continuous streams of immigrants ceaselessly flowed into America. Under these circumstances Lutheran institutions found it impossible to make a quick and simple adjustment to the American scene.

A good case in point is the Lutheran Church in America, whose roots go back to the 17th century and particularly to H. M. Muhlenberg in the 18th. At each point where those Lutherans began to *acclimatize* or relate themselves fully to the American context, in would come a fresh wave of German immigrants, and the entire process of Americanization had to begin anew. One is reminded of S. S. Schmucker, in the early and mid-19th century, who attempted to relate Lutheranism to the issues of the American Protestant scene. This immediately brought him into conflict with the other Lutheran groups still basically oriented to the German situation. This does not deny the profound theological issues involved in that controversy; rather it points to the fact that the theological issues themselves were as much German problems as they were an effort properly to understand the Lutheran Confessions.

The Lutheran seminaries, in their own peculiar way, participated in this situation. They found it very difficult to make a major contribution to the totality of American society and life until the Lutheran church herself, as formed through various Lutheran churches, became ready to relate herself to the American context.

This reminds us that seminaries inevitably are closely linked to the churches that have brought them into being.

In addition to being "foreign" churches on the American scene, Lutheran churches faced two special problems in their new and strange situation. There were many things difficult for the Lutheran churches in America, but two factors in particular plagued them, and in some respects still bother Lutherans. The first is the fact that in America Lutheran churches encountered a system of voluntarism, utterly foreign to their entire ecclesiastical history and tradition. Perhaps of all the churches that came to America, this was most difficult for Lutheranism because it had had such a strong position within nations of great cultural significance — Germany, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. To be transported into an alien culture was difficult enough, but to find that the church was called upon to live as a minority group was almost incomprehensible.

Even the Saxon Lutherans, dissatisfied with what was happening in Germany in the early 19th century, found this most difficult. In Germany their fight was within a single culture with no thought of religious liberty or voluntarism. They were concerned with the relation of the church to the total culture and with the interpenetration of each. Suddenly Lutheranism found itself in a situation where it had to go it alone. One is reminded of Muhlenberg's entry in his journal where after he first came to America he pointed out that to be a preacher in America one "must fight his way through with the sword of His spirit alone and depend on faith in the living God and His promises." This was to him a very strange but exciting

experience. It has taken Lutheranism a long time to understand the fact that this situation has formed and shaped it in ways that are not yet understood. This fact is grasped by European Lutherans looking at their American brethren, but it is not as evident to Lutherans in America.

The peculiarity of the American situation is evident in early Lutheran seminary life. Seminaries reflected the continental institutions transplanted to America in the form of theological texts, problems, and insights. These facts have long been known; they are employed here only to make clear the special American challenges to the Lutheran churches, the risk that the forefathers took, and how exceedingly difficult it must have been for them.

A second thing proved to be of great difficulty to Lutheranism, and it remains a major problem for them to the present. Lutheranism always has claimed to be a church and experienced herself as that in culture and in her confessions. In the American scene Lutheranism appeared as a denomination similar to all other denominations. The church did not exist in America in the way Lutheranism existed in Europe. Lutheranism was a total institution interpenetrating culture at all points, responsible under God for this culture, ministering to it, creating it, formed by it, judging it, redeeming it. Lutherans believed God to be working through the church to do all these things; thus church and society were so interconnected that one could not separate them.

That is the way history was formed in the Western world, but this was not true in the American context. Lutherans were one among many denominations, each claiming

the full truth and yet each having to act as if it had but a partial truth. In a way the church involves a concept of space, of space held and filled, and Lutherans filled a very small space in a very large continent. It is in such a context that the problem of a confessional church becomes acute. The problem does not emerge for a group that does not think of itself as a confessional church but rather as an organization of men who seek to convert individuals into a similar set of beliefs. Revivalistic and highly individualistic organizations simply did not have a problem at this point. Not so with the Lutherans. They were not a sect in the traditional sense of the word, like the Anabaptists. That is, Lutherans were not in protest against culture and society which was to be condemned and denied so that they were forced to withdraw from it in order to create a new and pure Christian community. In a way Lutherans were withdrawn from the culture because of their language, but not for long.

All of this is reflected in Lutheran theological education. The striking thing in Lutheran history in the American context is how little self-awareness there was within Lutheranism as it struggled with these problems. Basically the issues were still formed by a European context set by the confessions and now transferred to the American scene. Lutheran seminaries did not deal primarily with special problems emerging from the totally new context in America. There are exceptions to this, but they are exceptions. Lutheran theological education in the American context sought first and foremost to define the different Lutheran groups in America in relation to one another.

This is a major shift in the history of

Lutheranism. The Lutheran Confessions were originally the testimony of the Lutheran church at a given point in history whereby those churches could define themselves in agreement and difference with their Christian brethren. In America these same confessions became a measure primarily to distinguish and set differences between Lutherans. Though they were employed to define Lutheranism against other denominations in America, it turned out that this was not their major usage. The confessions became major weapons in the battle of Lutherans with one another in America.

Did Lutheran theological education contribute anything in the American context in addition to Lutherans using their confessions in a new way against one another? Have they made any distinctive contribution to the American theological scene through the students they have prepared? It would be more appropriate to have somebody else deal with the issue. It is not proper or in good grace for a Lutheran to stand among his fellow Lutherans and recount the contributions of Lutheran theological education in America.

There are, however, two mitigating factors. First, the author is not connected with a Lutheran institution and has never taught in one. Secondly, the factors recounted here have been gathered from colleagues, none of whom are Lutherans, who have taught large numbers of Lutheran theological students.

There appear to be five major contributions that Lutheran theological education has made in America. It has not developed these exclusively but has contributed strongly to them. One of the

strong points in Lutheran theological education is that it demands that the student must think systematically in theology. All students take a heavy load of dogmatics or what others call systematic theology. They are required to read through a single theological system based on the confessions of the church. At Concordia Franz Pieper's *Christian Dogmatics* was the text; in the former United Lutheran Church in America Heinrich Schmid's *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* was the text. Of course in Lutheran dogmatics courses at their best these works are complemented by and contrasted with modern alternatives like the systematic theologies of Tillich, Barth, Brunner, Aulén, and Niebuhr.

To be sure, the Lutheran dogmatic tradition can be taught so as to be deadly and dull. But it can also be the basis for disciplined thinking in theology. That is, a student required to take dogmatics, to work through one historic system, quickly learns that there is a genuine logical and theological relationship between the problem of reason and revelation and the authority of Scripture, the doctrine of the church, Christology, and eschatology. One learns that one does not theologize piecemeal by taking one issue in which he happens to be interested and developing only that to the exclusion of other facts of a total theological schema or picture. At its best, Lutheran theological education in America inculcates in its students a certain style of theologizing in which the theological perspective held must be systematically developed. This is a major contribution to the American scene because it is usually absent from Protestant churches.

A second contribution to the American

scene is that Lutheranism has been one of the few denominations that has insisted, throughout its history, on a learned ministry. The question is why did Lutheranism insist on a learned ministry when in American history most churches did not? Many American Protestants argued that a learned ministry stood in the way of the Spirit of God and prevented the Gospel from making its maximum impact. There is primarily one reason for a learned ministry — theologically it is believed to be necessary.

The Word of God in its fullness admits of no simple handling. The simplest soul can be grasped by it, but so can the most profound intellectual. The church stands under the divine Word and is forced to seek to understand it faithfully and fully in each generation. The church ought not to deny her responsibility to seek the fullest possible understanding of God's Word to man. This is a profound, exacting, and difficult task. Theologizing is not a game or an intellectual exercise. It is the church seeking to understand faithfully the meaning of God's Word for our world.

The church can never cease theologizing. Paul did not start it; God started it when He called Adam and Eve to account. And this process will go on as long as man is man and God is God. This is why the church needs a learned ministry. It is for this reason that the Lutheran Church has always insisted that its students learn languages. This does not in itself make a learned ministry or prove that one is a professional man. Languages such as Greek and Hebrew are absolutely necessary tools for the church in order that her ministry might seek to understand as fully as possible the meaning of the Gospel and its

relevance to the age in which we find ourselves. The Lutheran Church has helped at this point in the American scene.

A third contribution of the Lutheran Church to theological education has been its participation in, respect for, and teaching of the liturgical life. It is one of the few churches in America to do this. This is not intended to be understood as part of a "high church-low church" controversy. It is only to state that within Lutheran theological education the concern has always been not only to educate the mind but also to shape and form a man's spiritual life through liturgical life. It is appreciated as the most significant point of contact with the church of the early centuries.

It is through this avenue, through the dynamics of the church year, through the structure of liturgy and its grounding in history, and through the hymns that we sing and the prayers that we pray that we are part and parcel of the church universal. Lutheran theological education has always insisted on this and has always called for a certain type of life which finds its center in liturgical practice. That is why Lutherans criticize themselves when they fail at this point in theological education. It remains central to Lutheranism and so to Lutheran theological education. Lutheran students are marked by it for better or for worse.

Fourthly, Lutheran theological education at its best has always inculcated a sense of history in students. That is, whatever other problems Lutherans have had, they never thought that the church dropped out of heaven in the 19th or the 16th century, that it started in Missouri, or in Pennsylvania, let alone in Wittenberg. There has always been in Lutheran theological edu-

cation a very profound sense of the continuity of the Christian community from its beginnings to the present.

This gives Lutheranism a certain stability, but it also presents it with a few problems. At this point we are concerned with its positive value. Lutheran theological education exhibits a profound concern with the total past of the Christian community. It recognizes that Christianity is an historical religion formed by God's encounter with man under the conditions of history. It does not wish to leap out of history or to deny history. It realizes that it must think historically as well as dogmatically. Thus it confronts students with the reality of the church in its various phases of history past and present. Because American students tend to be unconcerned about history the historical emphasis is a healthy counterbalance.

Also, Lutheran theological education, insofar as it reflects the Lutheran Church, its theology, its stance on life, has inculcated in its students a view of nature and grace that has been most wholesome for the American scene. That is, it has not been afraid or disdainful of music, art, literature, aesthetics, yes, even of sex and family. Lutheranism, grounded and rooted in Luther's insights, could not depreciate aesthetics. It cannot be denied that Lutheranism has had its problems with pietism at this point, but here it must be stated clearly that the central Lutheran tradition is the affirmation of the goodness of God's world. Though the world is distorted by sin, the church has argued, following Luther, that the world provides us with channels of God's grace as it comes through history, institutions, people, and nature. At its best Lutheran theological

education has stood for this and has instilled such a view in its best students:

Five points have been enumerated as contributions of Lutheran theological education in America. Concordia has participated in these. I would be ungracious and unwise to stop at this point. The fact is that these obvious strong points have also proved to be weak points and in some case disaster points. One need not fear genuine self-criticism made from within; rather one fears self-satisfaction. To assess properly the role and contributions of Lutheran theological education it is necessary to note also its distortions and shortcomings. It is possible to take each of the five contributions and show how they have led to distortions. Attention should be paid to several of the most important distortions.

One can begin with the emphasis on and concern with the dogmatic or systematic character of theology. It is not unfair to state that at its worst this has at times given Lutheranism a rather cantankerous spirit. It has been so concerned with precise definition for its own sake that it has often failed to see why the definition is theologically important. Lutheranism has often been so caught up in the internal discussions of its own confessions that it was out of touch with the reality of the world to which it is called to minister.

It is possible to be so set in a systematic-dogmatic pattern that a church is incapable of the necessary give and take with which it is called upon to face every generation. Granted both the clarity and the ambiguity of the Roman Catholic dogmatic position it is worth noting that the ambiguity has provided a valuable flexibility. The Second Vatican Council's ability to face basic

theological issues makes one wonder where what Tillich called the Protestant principle is really to be found today, in the Church of Rome or in the churches of the Reformation.

A similar observation can be made when one analyzes the Lutheran concern for history and continuity. At its best it should mean that Lutheran theological students who become pastors and professors have a sense of continuity and of historical consciousness. But have they? Are they really different from members of any other American denomination at this point? Lutherans tend to patronize Protestant brethren who speak of the centrality of that "old time religion" which is actually mid-19th century in origin. Such Christians leap from the New Testament to the American frontier and see little or nothing in between.

But a close analysis reveals that Lutherans in America have not done too much differently. They concentrate on the church of Augustine, leap to Luther, concentrate on the 17th century, close the books about 1700 in Europe, and give a brief nod to their own denomination theologically and historically. This approach is beginning to change, but the point is that this has been the pattern of Lutheran theological education, whether at Concordia, Philadelphia, Chicago, or St. Paul, or most of the other Lutheran seminaries. A brief review of Lutheran seminary curricula reflects this problem, though there has been a marked change in the last decade.

The problem of historical consciousness is a major problem of this epoch, that is, when man tries to understand himself qua

man in a very inhuman age, he must understand himself as part of a historical process and as part of nature. If that is the problem, then Lutherans as Christians must seek to understand the relation between man's historical consciousness and the history of salvation as encountered in the life of the church and the world. This has not been done. What is perhaps the major theological issue today? Bultmann stated the problem — how is it possible to state the meaning of the Gospel which reaches us in language and ideas derived largely from a post-Hellenistic civilization, in a world of technology, outer space, and space exploration? He posed the question, and it is a question with which we shall be dealing for a long time.

This is the kind of age where it is no longer possible simply to hold theological confessions in repetitive form and think that faithful repetition means the faithful delivery of the Gospel. The church is not called upon to play handball with the Christian faith and her confessions by bouncing them off the walls of history.

The basic problem is to incarnate the Gospel in contemporary thought forms, and, in terms of the tensions, problems, and potentialities of the world in which we live today. This is what is meant by a learned ministry. What made the ministry learned and therefore effective for a past age does not necessarily make it learned today. What is required today is not simply a repetition of the disciplined way the learned ministry was produced in the past, but rather a fresh discovery of new scholarly requirements to be wedded with certain of the older disciplines in order to create a new kind of learned ministry that is as relevant and creative for our

day as the old ministry was for the immediate past. One thing is clear. The learned ministry cannot be defined as the education of efficient practitioners who prove eminently successful in raising money and constantly increasing the size of the congregations in order to meet the standards of success that mark the business world. In no sense is the church opposed to reception of increasing funds or to increase in numbers. But it is equally true that these things, in themselves, do not point to a faithful and a creative ministry. The church can gain the whole world and lose her soul.

It is appropriate at a moment such as this to salute the past of Lutheran theological education. For 125 years Concordia Seminary has contributed to the preparation of men for the ministry and to the theological clarity necessary for the church to perform her ministry. The duty of the present generation is not to point to a glorious past but in deep gratitude to look to that past as the seminary seeks new ways for service to the present and the future. Just as the men who founded this institution took risks and exhibited faith, so the men of this generation now responsible for this institution must take comparable risks. It is impossible to outline or analyze the context in which these present-day risks are to be taken. Nevertheless it is possible to delineate quickly three or four of the major factors which mark the contemporary world of theological education.

The first factor of primary import for Lutheran theological education is the internal reassessment of Lutheranism in the American scene. It is not a question of advocating further union within the Lutheran churches now. It is a fact that the dy-

namics of history are such that the relationship of the three remaining major Lutheran groups is one of the most important issues of the hour for all three groups. There is a *kairos* to history, and that is precisely the kind of moment in which the Lutheran churches now find themselves. Just as the pressure of history in the immediate past called upon the forefathers of the Lutheran churches in America to defend distinct differences among themselves, this is a moment of history when the Lutheran churches, in a new form, are called upon to reassess their common bases and their common faith. If that is the case, then the Lutheran theological seminaries have a special task confronting them. In addition to their responsibility as Lutheran institutions to other Christian seminaries, they bear a special responsibility to work through the task of the reassessment of the oneness of the Lutheran churches in America within the same confessions and their oneness in Christ.

It is easy to point out that these are fine sentiments but that the obstacles remaining between the three Lutheran groups are such that reality prevents further action. Historical obstacles are never to be denied or ignored. To do that is to invite chaos or destruction. However, it is also possible to concentrate so fully on the obvious obstacles that new and exciting possibilities are overlooked. Those of us who had experience at the Vatican Council and have been involved in the dialog with Roman Catholicism, have found this point central to the present ecumenical movement. It is frequently possible to discuss basic theological differences more honestly and openly with Roman Catholic theologians than it is for Lutherans to discuss such

issues in a comparable spirit with one another. That is, it is easier for many Lutheran theologians to discuss the problem of justification through faith with Roman Catholic theologians like Hans Küng or Gregory Baum than it is to discuss the same problem with fellow Lutheran theologians. The point is that it should be possible for Lutheran theologians and Lutheran theological institutions to shift their perspective of discussion from that which marks their differences to those points in which they find their oneness. It is clear that these institutions have not yet found a sufficient number of ways, both new and exciting, to enhance such a discussion.

Just as the new situation between Lutheran churches provides a new context for Lutheran theological education, so the total new dialog situation confronts Lutheran seminaries with a new set of problems and possibilities. The change at this point is so drastic that five years mark almost a millennium. The key to the drastic change is the entry of the Roman Catholic Church into ecumenical dialog. One must not undervalue the contributions of the ecumenical movement as represented in the World Council of Churches and in various national church movements. Neither should one downgrade the efforts of the various worldwide denominational groups like the Lutheran World Federation. Nevertheless the fact remains that once the Roman Catholic Church seriously entered the arena of ecumenical dialog, then the entire picture was changed drastically. What most Protestants still do not understand is the fact that the Roman Catholic entry into this arena provides an opportunity not only for dialog with them but equally provides a fresh perspective in

terms of which Protestant groups tend to look at one another.

All Protestants are quick to note that the new situation of dialog with Roman Catholicism does not imply that they are all about to become Roman Catholic. Such a presupposition would be destructive of the ecumenical movement itself. We are at that point in history where for the first time since the Council of Trent, Protestants and Roman Catholics can look honestly and seriously at their unity in Christ as well as at the differences, both real and imagined, which have long separated them. Though Protestant churches understand this point clearly, few if any of them carry that point through with regard to themselves. Do not most Lutheran churches, for example, tend to think that all other Lutherans, to say nothing of all other Christians, will eventually become exactly like them? Do not many Lutherans wait for the day when all Lutherans will be in the Lutheran Church in America or will be Missouri Synod style Lutherans? Just as we rightfully feel that the center of the ecumenical dialog is not to make all non-Roman Catholics into Roman Catholics, so we should be willing to turn the question and recognize likewise that we must not assume that all other Christian groups will become exactly like us.

These factors are not only ecclesiastical points to be considered, they have vast implications for theological education. They call for a serious reassessment of the theological scene. It involves the restructure of curriculum as well as a close analysis of the content of the various courses in theological institutions. The new dialog situation between Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Orthodoxy, and Judaism, and

the coming dialog with the world religions, confronts theological education with a most serious challenge. It involves the content of the various courses, the way the courses are taught, the materials that are employed, and the context in which the work is carried through. Theological professors can no longer work as if this new dialog situation did not exist. Professors can no longer handle theological dimensions of these other groups as if hostility or indifference were the major perspectives from which such groups are to be studied.

Five years ago an analysis of the theological scene raised serious questions as to the future for many churchmen. The immediate past had been marked by the presence of theological giants, and their influence was still predominant at that time. The age had been marked by a series of first rate creative, systematic, minds such as Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Rudolf Bultmann, Emil Brunner, Gustav Aulén, Anders Nygren, and the Niebuhr brothers. To have such a group of theologians, all contemporary, working together in a single epoch in history is indeed remarkable. However one might evaluate these theologians, it was widely felt that this might well prove to be one of the most significant periods in systematic theology within recent Christian history. The passing of these giants creates special problems for theological education. Nowhere on the scene did there or do there appear to be men of their stature ready to take their place in theology. Some of us charged with the responsibility for theological education reluctantly came to the conclusion that it might be the fate of our generation to repeat and to clarify the legitimate and

genuinely constructive insights of these theologians. In itself, this is a worthy calling for theologians, but it is simply not too exciting or challenging. Many of us were prepared to say that this was to be the fate of the present generation in theological education.

At that moment John XXIII appeared on the scene and injected an exciting new dimension into the picture. No longer were theologians called upon only to reassess and interpret the work of the immediate past theological giants. Dialog was the new context in which all theological work was to be carried on. The work of men such as Barth, Tillich, and Bultmann was now to be viewed in the context of dialog among Christians and between Christianity and Judaism. It is no longer possible to theologize seriously or responsibly as a Christian apart from what Roman Catholic theologians have to say on the key theological issues. Likewise, Roman Catholic theologians can no longer carry on their work as if there were no Roman Catholic theologians since the Council of Trent. It is in this sense that the impact of ecumenical dialog on theological education is just beginning. Its full meaning will not become evident for another 10 or 15 years.

Finally, Lutheran theological education, along with all theological education in the contemporary scene, finds itself in a challenging situation marked by a new relationship between church and world. It is not possible in these brief moments to do more than point to the issue. Theologians are always tempted by two oversimplified generalizations. On the one hand, they are tempted to argue that the world is so dras-

tically different in their age that the church has never seen anything comparable at any point in the past. On the other hand they argue that the church has always confronted major crises and there have been many crises in the past as acute as, or even similar to, the one the church faces today. The question is not that of finding a middle ground between two extremes. Rather the problem is properly to analyze the context and milieu in which the church is challenged to work today. It is not necessary to make comparisons past and present; it is necessary only to make absolutely clear the nature and depth of the situation in which the church is called upon to work now. This does not ignore the past; it builds upon it without being a slave to it.

Theologians use such terms as the post-Christian epoch, or the world come of age, or the extremely secular stance of this age, to mark a major differentiation between the present and the immediate past. Whether such terms are accurate or not cannot be argued here. One point must be made with clarity and that is to remind theologians that there is a drastic difference between the presuppositions of the world and the role of the church in culture in the immediate past and the presuppositions of the world and the role of the church in the immediate present. These are realities that ought not to be glossed over or ignored. Furthermore, theological professors must not overlook the drastic changes that have occurred in the social and institutional forms of modern life. These changes compel the church to rethink its form of ministry and even the institutional forms of the church in the world today. Such issues are now central for theological education.

In this situation several things are clear. First, the theological thought forms and concepts with which the church works must remain faithful to the intent and the insight of the past while the church remains equally free to find new forms and concepts to express this truth. This has happened in every epoch of the church, and it is happening even today. Likewise, new forms of the ministry and of the institutional organizational life of the church are emerging throughout the Western world. These new forms are not the result of abstract thought on the part of logical minds. Rather the new forms emerge out of the struggle between older forms and contemporary forces in the life of the Christian community. They emerge out of present patterns and are forged in the crucible of day to day life. However, history teaches us that present patterns never change on their own, and a fear of change involves more than a so-called cultural lag. It is this primary question that the church confronts today. It takes courage, responsible action, experimentation, and faith to risk change in familiar and beloved patterns.

One has neither the insight nor the time to prophesy what the new form of the ministry will be. One only knows that H. Richard Niebuhr was correct when he pointed out that the church has had at least three or four major shifts in the concept of the ministry over the past 1500 years and that the church will have additional shifts in the future. The point is that either theological institutions will play a creative and a key role in the emergence of the ministry, or this new form will emerge in spite of the theological institutions. If the former happens the semi-

naries will be responsible in their role in the life of the church. If the latter happens, seminaries will have reneged their responsibility and will actually thwart the emergence of the new forms that the church is called upon to bring into being.

The question here is the role of the Lutheran seminaries in relation to the Lutheran churches. Do these seminaries show as much imagination, creativity, and willingness to risk in this exciting new venture as did the men who took that long fearful journey from the old world to the new and planted an institution such as Concordia Seminary? The fact is that the challenge faced by contemporary members of this institution is just as great, perhaps greater, as that faced by the founding fathers. That is the responsibility of in-

stitutions at this moment in history — to be faithful to its calling in this epoch. Thus the children of the fathers hold fast to their past, honor it, live out of it in the awareness that they cannot leap out of it, but they bear their own particular call to be responsible to their own particular period. Lutheran theological education faces its own special challenges in its own present epoch. It cannot confront these challenges simply by repeating what the fathers have said in the past. Neither can it face these challenges by ignoring what the fathers have said in the past. It must take its stance responsibly, openly, and freely in order that theological institutions might play their role in the life of the church's ministry today.

Chicago, Ill.