

# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

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# The Mission of Concordia Seminary

By ALFRED O. FUERBRINGER

Perhaps the title needs a word of explanation. We do not ordinarily think of "mission" in connection with long-established educational institutions unless, perhaps, they are located in foreign lands and are part of a "mission" related to a sending church. In fact, all too often "education," even ministerial and missionary training, has been viewed critically as a rival of "missions" for the church's concern, interest, and dollar. We disagree radically with this viewpoint and wish at the very outset to express our conviction that every church-related institution, especially every theological seminary, must have its specific mission in the church and remain true to it. Even as its founding must have filled a felt need, its history and development should clearly set forth its conscious effort to read and to carry out its part of God's plan for the life and growth of His church. As a small contribution to the 125th anniversary celebration of the founding of Concordia Seminary this article will attempt to describe the mission of this school as we see it today.

In Biblical terms the mission of a theological seminary can be expressed quite simply as that given in 2 Tim. 2:2: "What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." St. Paul's language makes it easy to compare St. Timothy, the theological professor appointed by the apostle, as well as every seminary professor who owes his position to the church's response to the apostolic injunction, with runners in a relay race. Each one receives

the baton from a predecessor and later hands it to a successor. In the meantime, he has run with it and moved forward along the race course.

Concordia Seminary was founded in 1839 by confessionally oriented Lutheran immigrants from Germany. Originally a classical preparatory school with a hope of developing into a university with a school of theology, by 1843 its program was narrowed down to preparation of pastors and teachers for American Lutheran congregations. Its history shows several expansions and contractions of purpose and function, but over the long haul its single objective became the training of pastors for the synod which owns and operates it. When during the major span of its existence any of its graduates moved into other areas of work than the parish pastorate, they did so without specific preparation from the seminary. In most cases they had to "work themselves into" their new ministry.

Within the last 25 years a trend has set in which has widened the scope of Concordia Seminary's activity far beyond anything carried out previously. This is a growing trend. It opens up some large vistas for the mission of this school in the future, as will be pointed out later.

Concordia Seminary has always been very conscious of its Biblical and Lutheran orientation. Its faculty has viewed faithfulness in receiving and accepting from the historic church the unchanging revelation given by God in the Sacred Scriptures and equal faithfulness in passing it on to the

next generation as determining the Christian character of the seminary. The faculty has also regarded working at its task altogether within the framework of the Book of Concord as the criterion for the orientation of the seminary as Lutheran.

The faculty realizes that faithfulness to its task demands of a theological seminary alertness to its age, to the culture in which it is placed, and to the condition of the church in which it operates. Also required is the proper response to these factors. The study of the individual Biblical books with their differing approaches, accents, and terminology, reflecting the situation and culture contemporary with their origin, points up the pattern which the church of later ages must follow. This Concordia Seminary has endeavored to do. In 1956 its faculty, together with that of its sister Concordia at Springfield, Ill., in response to a request from the Synod defined a doctrine as "an article of faith which the church, in obedience to her Lord, and in response to her specific needs, derives according to sound principles of interpretation from Scripture as the sole source of doctrine and sets forth in a form adapted to teaching" (*The Lutheran Witness*, May 8, 1956, p.178). With this definition the faculties, in full obedience to their Lord, wished to show their alertness to the need of constant attendance upon the message of the written Word, and of a constant concern for the church and its teaching outreach.

Concordia Seminary views its mission from different angles as that of a student, a guide, a servant, a critic, a worshiper, and a ministering brother.

That the whole seminary community must be engaged in constant study is usu-

ally taken for granted. If the purpose of the school is to be achieved, the approach to the subject matter must be contemporary and fresh, and a live relationship to the other areas of learning and fields of human endeavor must be maintained. The outcomes, however, must always give evidence of complete obedience to the Sacred Scriptures and of operation within the bounds of the Confessions.

The theological seminary is also to serve as a guide. It carries out this function, in the first place, for the prospective ministers whom it seeks to lead to theological maturity so that they acquire the knowledge and skills and develop the attitudes necessary for the administration of the office they seek. The seminary also serves as a guide for the ministers in office as well as the church as a whole, in order that the changing conditions under which the church is called upon to live and work may be recognized and effective measures may be taken to meet the demands which they impose on the church. This gives the theological seminary the duty of acting as explorer, but also emphasizes the need of meriting and keeping the confidence of the church.

The seminary is a servant of the church that has built it and maintains it. While its work is largely intellectual, it is not in an exclusive sense the intellect of the church. It is a versatile member of the body, which serves all the other members. The needs of the body determine the service which each member is to render.

The seminary has the function of critic. At this point we concur with the contention that the seminary is "to aid the church to understand what it is doing and by understanding to modify or redirect these

actions." (H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry*, p. 125)

The seminary also has the function of worshiping and engaging in Christian service. Here, too, Niebuhr has put the problem of all seminaries well: "Hence while a community which centers in worship is not a theological school, a theological school in which worship is not a part of the daily and weekly rhythm of activity cannot remain a center of intellectual activity directed toward God. Preaching and hearing the proclamation is not theological study; but if students of theology, in all their degrees of immaturity and maturity, do not attend to the Word addressed to them as selves, their study represents flight from God and self. A community of service to men is not as such a theological center; but a school that studies man-before-God and man in relation to neighbor without the accompaniment of frequent, direct encounter with human *Thous*, serving and being served, has become too irresponsible to neighbors to be called a divinity school." (Niebuhr, p. 131)

To be simultaneously teacher and learner, leader and servant, to be a student of theology striving for mastery of the subject matter and at the same time a humble worshiper of God who is the subject under study, is the extremely difficult but necessary task of the theological seminary.

The function of Concordia Seminary is stated in recent catalogs as follows:

The function of Concordia Seminary is to provide a spiritual, cultural, and social environment (1) where male college graduates with the necessary prerequisites can acquire the academic knowledge and the professional skills required for the

effective exercise of the sacred ministry of the Word in The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod; (2) where such students can attain the special competence which particular aspects of the ministry demand; and (3) where qualified clergymen, teachers, and lay people can acquire professional postgraduate training in theology.

To qualify for the parish ministry within The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod it is necessary that:

1. The candidate accepts the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and of practice; and all the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church contained in the Book of Concord as a true and unadulterated statement and exposition of the Word of God; that

2. He possesses an understanding and appreciation of the total area of Biblical theology; and the skill to interpret the Scriptures on the basis of their original languages and in accordance with sound hermeneutical principles; that

3. He also possesses an understanding and appreciation of the church's formulation of Scriptural doctrine in the light of its varying needs; and the skill to present such doctrine clearly; furthermore, that

4. He possesses an understanding and appreciation of God's guidance in the on-going life of the church and its continuing interaction with the social order; and the skill to investigate the church's past and to interpret it to all sorts and conditions of men; finally, that

5. He possesses an understanding and appreciation of the needs of individuals and groups on all age levels, especially their spiritual needs; and the skill to meet these needs, to cultivate Christian growth, and to guide people in serving one another effectively in the body of Christ and in becoming faithful witnesses of the Word.

In our opinion this was a good statement when it was adopted a dozen years ago and has served its purpose well. As Concordia Seminary, however, completes its 125th year, takes a good look at itself, and restudies everything about its function and structure, it sees itself called to an expanding mission. The five numbered paragraphs in the statement of function are still basic for the total effort and supply adequate detail with regard to the undergraduate training program for the parish ministry to furnish information and guidance to students, faculty, board of control, sister institutions, board of assignments, and other officers and boards, as well as the membership of the Synod.

The School for Graduate Studies, however, with its appeal to a widening circle of students far beyond the borders of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod and its sister churches at home and abroad, with its degree program for teachers, its new programs of research and publication, needs to be reflected more adequately in the statement of function. The same is true of the missionary training program which in recent years has consolidated its core offerings and from a position of strength is now about to expand in content and outreach.

Within the last year a major step was taken in the development of a program of continuing education for the clergy. The beginning was made by arranging for the offering of scholarships to the graduates of 10 years ago for the purpose of enabling them to return to the seminary for at least one term of graduate study or in-service education. The development of curricular offerings covering the needs of men 10 years after entering the ministry, the active

promotion of extension centers in various parts of the country, and similar development of the correspondence school are further aspects of this endeavor.

Then there is the matter of in-service placement. Traditionally the faculty has turned its graduates over to the District Presidents and church boards just prior to ordination but after that first assignment has done nothing officially and very little unofficially to help congregations, institutions, organizations, and church boards find the men with the particular skills, training, and experience they need. Nor has a regular procedure been developed for guiding men, after their first placement into the work of the church, into positions of greater service or of particular need or challenge. In a growing church with an ordained clergy exceeding 5,500 as of this writing, some of this work becomes part of the seminary's mission.

There are also other areas of service which have been entered by this seminary (in some cases rather hesitantly) and which call for greater effort in the future. Among them are the theological education offered to the laity, the mission to the community, service to the church at large on the part of the faculty, cooperation with other seminaries and contributions to their greater effectiveness.

Finally, there is the more clearly emerging concept of the many ministries in the church for which the seminary should offer not only basic and general courses but a growing measure of specific preparation. This calls for a program of earlier recognition of student aptitudes and interests, special attention to guided studies, and carefully controlled fieldwork. It also means cooperation with and referral to

various new types of institutions which alone are in a position to meet some of the educational needs of today's church workers.

This sums up the mission of Concordia Seminary for 1965 and the years immediately following. The various accents indicated will, we expect, provide some wholesome tensions and beneficial cross-fertilization. At this juncture in its history Con-

cordia Seminary, having provided more than 7,500 ministers for the church it serves, sees itself as being sent to perform ever greater tasks in the church and the world which surrounds it. We earnestly pray God to give to all connected with the seminary a humble, dedicated spirit and the wisdom, courage, and strength to fulfill its mission.

St. Louis, Mo.