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# Inauguration Address

*As delivered by the Rev. Dr. Robert Preus on the occasion of his inauguration as the thirteenth president of Concordia Theological Seminary on September 15, 1974.*

ROBERT D. PREUS

There are so many things that one could say on an occasion like this that I hardly know where to start. Certainly a few personal remarks are in place first of all. It is a great honor to be called to a Lutheran seminary which for over 100 years has been preparing men for the Christian ministry, the greatest honor which I have ever received or ever expect to receive. And in speaking of this seminary I am not thinking of brick and mortar or a place in a city, but of people, faculty and students. And it is a great joy to be accepted by a faculty, a student body, a board of control and many townspeople and fellow Christians—to be received as my family and I have been received since moving to Springfield. The Christian love and hospitality which my family and I have experienced in these few weeks here is overwhelming and is a reflection not on us, but on your kindness and generosity.

But this evening I know you expect me to do more than make a few well chosen personal remarks. Tonight I should like to talk to you for a few minutes about a subject which I am sure is important to all of us here. I should like to speak about what Concordia Theological Seminary is and what it ought to be and, by grace, shall be—and about what I would like to be a part of as this school of the prophets moves into its future.

Naturally I cannot be very specific because I am new here—although in passing I might just mention that our board of control has yesterday authorized three new chairs to be endowed in missions, evangelism and stewardship and the beginning of a graduate school to confer the Doctor of Ministry degree and has taken hold of many other bold projects, all of which augur well for the future of our school and its service to the church.

Rather I should like to speak this evening in generalities about the school and its future, but in generalities which are very important. I believe that this school is and ought to be exactly what its name indicates: Concordia Theological Seminary. Those who named this school knew what they were doing and they named it well.

1. *Concordia*. There is a word and name for this institution, a goal for this institution, a goal which we ought all to foster and for which I as president will give my labors and my life. It is significant that *Concordia* is the name given to almost all of our colleges and seminaries in the Missouri Synod. It is the name originally given our Lutheran Confessions which every pastor in the Lutheran Church subscribes and which has united Lutheranism in the Christian doctrine in a way almost unique in the history of the church.

*Concordia.* That is a Latin word meaning unity, harmony, agreement. Not agreement to disagree, not negotiated agreement in this or that, not agreement through compromise. But agreement, unity in the Gospel and in all its articles, agreement in the doctrine which we all believe, teach and confess. This unity which has in the past typified and ought to typify this institution is not the unity of the holy Christian and apostolic church described in our creed; it is not the oneness which is simply given by the Holy Spirit to all who believe in Christ and therefore make up His church.

*Concordia* is rather an external oneness in doctrine, often a fragile thing, but a God-pleasing thing and greatly to be prized, achieved by grace only, often after much struggle, prayer, controversy and even suffering. Paul speaks of this unity when he says, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10).

*Concordia.* But the struggle and the suffering to achieve it is always worth it. For unity in the pure doctrine of the Gospel is not only a basis for all preaching and teaching and evangelism and love and work in the church, as our Lutheran Reformers never tired of stressing. It is also an end in itself, the highest worship and service of God, the noblest hallowing of His Name. How is God's name hallowed, Luther asks in our Small Catechism. And the answer: "When the word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God also lead a holy life according to it." This seminary is dedicated unashamedly and unabashedly to the preaching and teaching of the pure doctrine of the Gospel and all its articles. And this seminary is dedicated to unity in this doctrine, complete unity and unanimity, unity in the faculty, unity in the student body, in our congregations and our synod. That is what is meant by our very name, *Concordia*. And to retain this unity shall remain a goal of this institution.\*

2. *Theological.* That is the second word in our name. We teach theology here. *Theology* means language about God. All our studies here center in God, in His Word, His will, His mighty and redemptive acts, His Law and Gospel, His grace and salvation, His answers to every question, every condition and situation and exigency of life.

Many seminaries throughout the world have lost such a direction. They teach almost everything but theology. One seminary on the east coast in its four year curriculum requires only six hours devoted to the study of Scripture or Christian doctrine. Another divinity school in the East which I attended for three years had as the head of its department of doctrinal theology a professor who did not even believe in the existence of God, a thorough-going, atheistic humanist.

Such a development at a *theological* school is a travesty, an

\*See Preface to the Book of Concord, Tappert 14: "We are minded by the grace of the Holy Spirit to abide and remain unanimously in this confession of faith and to regulate all religious controversies and their explanations according to it." Cf. also FC, SD, Rule and Norm 1, 2, 8, 13, 16; Epit., Rule and Norm 3, 6.

absurdity. *Theology* is language, doctrine, about God. And in the nature of the case you cannot study such a subject from a detached, uninvolved, faithless posture. God is not an idea or theory. He is the living Lord of heaven and earth, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, the Redeemer and Savior of all men. One cannot study theology without being caught up by it, changed, born again, without commitment, without faith. As our old Lutheran teachers used to say, there is no such person as an unregenerate theologian.

Faith in what? In our *theology* of course, in our doctrine, in the Gospel. But in more than all that, in a person, in Christ, our Lord and Savior, the heart and center of all our theology. "Christ is the center of the circle," Luther says, "and all that Scripture tells us, if it be viewed rightly, will point to Him." The purpose of Scripture and all theology is to lead sinners to faith in Him. "Come unto me," He says. And in that profound theological masterpiece the Evangelist John says, "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31).

Faith in Christ, a life of fellowship with God, obedience to His will, hope in His coming—that is the goal of theology and of all our endeavors here. All this may sound crassly naive and simplistic or even piestic for an institution like ours, striving and struggling to achieve academic excellence, scholarship, accreditation, recognition; but such goals are all secondary and ancillary to the one goal of *theology* and this theological seminary.

During the past days and weeks I have wondered why I was chosen to be president of this seminary. Perhaps some of you have wondered too. There are many reasons for choosing a president. He may be an experienced educator or administrator or church leader or even public relations man. But the most important qualification is surely this: that he be a good, committed, orthodox *theologian*. It is my earnest wish and prayer that through the Word the Spirit of God will make me such a *theologian* here and that by grace I can offer evangelical *theological* leadership at Concordia *Theological* Seminary.

3. *Seminary*. That is the third word in our name. A *seminary* is not a university or college or divinity school. It is more than an ordinary school. The word "*seminary*" comes from the Latin word for "seed" or the verb "plant." We seek to implant something here in the minds and hearts and lives of our students. We seek to inculcate not merely facts, but faith; to teach not merely ethical principles, but love; to impart not merely information, but dedication, commitment. Commitment to what? To our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, of course. And to His Gospel, the good news, the never changing, always relevant good news, of what He has done to save us and all the world.

And to the only source of this Gospel, the written Word of God, Scripture. And to our Lutheran Confessions as a true and correct summary and exposition of the biblical Gospel and all its articles.

That's what we are about here at Concordia Theological Seminary. That is what we seek to inculcate here: total commitment, commitment to the highest and greatest work in all the world, ministry, the ministry of the Gospel, the ministry of reconciliation.

May I repeat: I am honored to be called to this seminary. And under God and by His grace I shall strive to be faithful and support its great name and its goals.

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