

Christ in the Classroom and Community

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The church's culture is unique. It is divine in character and centered in Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Thus the church engages the world but always finds itself in tension with the world. This suggests that the culture in which the church exists cannot simply be equated with the Church's culture. If the church is to be the church, then the world cannot set its agenda.

In contrast to a world that reduces life to a series of discrete moments of consumption, Concordia Theological Seminary offers a rationale for a life of true community, one characterized by cohesiveness in classroom and community. Concordia Theological Seminary's curriculum is a theological construct, a way of articulating a theological vision and a way of thought that determines life. That theological vision embraces a hermeneutic, an epistemology, a way of knowing God as He truly reveals Himself-incarnationally, sacramentally, and christologically. The incarnate Christ is the knowledge of God-the crucified Jesus shows us the very nature of God.

Theological education at the seminary is an integrated life. A curriculum is more than a collection of courses in academically independent disciplines. The center of all our endeavors is the crucified, risen and ascended Christ who has taken away our sins through His blood and remains really present with us through Word and Sacrament. Theology, then, and by extension Concordia Theological Seminary's curriculum, seamlessly joins the highest level of academic preparation with pastoral formation.

For the content of academic theology is more than information. It goes well beyond the mere form of propositional truth-it is lived reality in fellowship with the Holy Trinity. Theology ultimately fails in its purpose if it ceases to be pastoral in the sense of providing the church with essential and saving norms. Rather, theology is life-it is the story of God at work in human history to redeem a lost and sinful people.

Hence, pastoral practice is the locus of theological reality-theology forms the basis of what pastors do and what people receive, and then do with what they have received.

Pastoral practice involves a broad familiarity with theology in the richness of its expression. Starting with the Sacred Scriptures, which the Lutheran Confessions rightly call the "sole source, rule and norm for all theology and practice," students at Concordia Theological Seminary study exegetical theology and become conversant in the richness of the biblical witness. Historical theology and systematic theology enhance students' respect for the faithful confession of the truths of Scripture in the church through history, as well as in the Lutheran Church specifically. Finally, students cultivate the pastoral care of souls and the establishment of people in the Christian faith.

Such pastoral formation is not gained solely through academic study. At the center of the campus' physical and spiritual life stands Kramer Chapel. In this house of worship, students, staff, and faculty continually gather together as a community to receive God's gifts in His Word and Sacraments.

Concordia Theological Seminary firmly holds the conviction that Jesus Christ is present in our world in His gifts through which His flesh is given to our flesh as the place and instrument of His presence. This is a matter of Christology, that is, a matter of how Jesus Christ is available to the world through the church by the Holy Spirit. As Christ's people, we stand in the midst of a broken world as the presence of Christ to that world because, as the baptized, we bear witness in our words and lives to the Christ who dwells in us. Christ's presence in the world transforms culture and makes it new.

Christ present in classroom and community-by God's grace we are brought into this reality and live in this particularly Lutheran way of life. This is the theological commitment of Concordia Theological Seminary and gives focus to all of its work. It is most concretely expressed in the seminary's dedication to form pastoral theologians, that is, theological pastors. Such pastors will have fully integrated the christological reality of the living Word (preaching), baptism and the Lord's Supper. At the seminary, future pastors are immersed in a christologically focused, liturgically-lived-out life.

It is the sea in which all the seminary community swims, permeating all of its life. Students see this modeled in the lives of their professors and, in turn, will model and facilitate this in the lives of the people God entrusts to their care.

The great Lutheran theologian of the seventeenth century, Abraham Calov (1612-1686), captured the nature of theology well:

Theology proceeds from God, teaches us about God, and leads us to God. Only theology is the light of our mind, the healing remedy of our will, the antidote against sin, and the most effective stimulant for true piety. Only theology unites us with God and God with us. It is the stairway from earth to heaven. By it we ascend to heaven, and God descends to us and overwhelms us with heavenly gifts of every description. And so earth becomes to us a heaven, and heaven and earth are the same to us, and God becomes our portion. In theology we who are on earth teach those things the knowledge of which continues even in heaven. By means of theology the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, the dumb speak, the dead are given life; men are made partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). Such is the high value we place on the study of theology. "The declaration of Thy words giveth light and giveth understanding to little ones"(Psalm 119:130).

Theology is life-life in its fullness-centered in Christ-in the classroom and community.

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