

For the

LIFE of the WORLD

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CONCORDIA
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY
P R E S S

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Most of the artwork pictured in this issue hang in classrooms, in hallways, and in Kramer Chapel on the CTS campus.

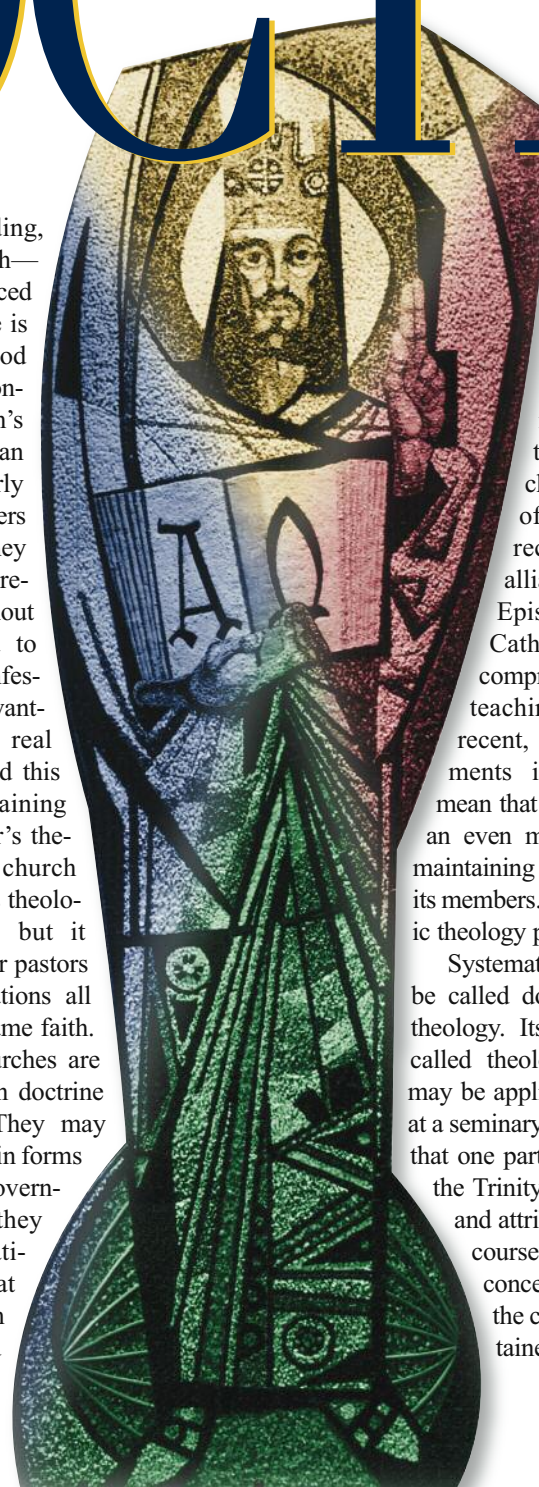
A Matter of DOCTRINE

Since its founding, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has placed the belief that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and the theology of Lutheran Confessions at the center of the church's life. In a reaction against the German Rationalism of the 1700s and early 1800s in which the Synod's founders were educated for the ministry, they were determined to establish congregations in America and throughout the world that were committed to Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. They wanted to be real Lutherans, and this meant maintaining Martin Luther's theology. Our church not only takes theology seriously, but it insists that our pastors and congregations all confess the same faith. Very few churches are as insistent on doctrine as we are. They may insist on certain forms of church government, but they allow for latitude in what pastors preach and teach and

Since circumstances in the world and with other Christians and Lutherans are constantly in flux, in order to maintain the Lutheran doctrine, the focus of courses in the Department of Systematic Theology must continually adjust to address new views and opinions that threaten our faith. Thus, if it is rightly said that to maintain the Lutheran faith systematic theology preserves the church's past, it is also true that of all the disciplines at a seminary systematic theology is the most contemporary.

what the people believe. For years, Lutherans have existed under all kinds of systems of government, but they have insisted on unity of doctrine. Things have changed for the majority of Lutherans, who in recent ecumenical alliances with Reformed, Episcopal, and Roman Catholic churches, have compromised basic Lutheran teaching doctrines. These recent, unfortunate developments in world Lutheranism mean that the Missouri Synod has an even more challenging job in maintaining the unity of faith among its members. Here is where systematic theology plays a vital role.

Systematic theology may simply be called dogmatics or dogmatical theology. Its courses may also be called theology, though this word may be applied to everything taught at a seminary or, more specifically, to that one part of dogmatics in which the Trinity and the divine essence and attributes are discussed. The courses in our department are concerned first in receiving the church's faith as it is contained in the Lutheran Con-



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By the Rev. Dr. David P. Scaer

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Since circumstances in the world and with other Christians and Lutherans are constantly in flux, in order to maintain the Lutheran doctrine, the focus of courses in the Department of Systematic Theology must continually adjust to address new views and opinions that threaten our faith. Thus, if it is rightly said that to maintain the Lutheran faith systematic theology preserves the church's past, it is also true that of all the disciplines at a seminary systematic theology is the most contemporary. Courses in historical theology trace the two-thousand-year history of the church and how its theology developed in response to false doctrines. Systematic theology makes use of the historical development of church doctrine, particularly the theological vocabulary and meaning of theological terms. While depending on past definitions, systematic theology, in preserving and defending the church's faith, has a contemporary interest in responding to the most recent theological developments. In the last half of the twentieth century, systematic theology has responded to the 'God-Is-Dead' theology, process theology, and feminism. Defining the church's faith also includes defending it against teachings that are contrary to the Bible and our confession in Christ. Unless systematic theology is up to date, it is not adequately performing its task. Old problems must be remembered and new ones addressed.

At the present time, the required courses in the Department of Systematic Theology consist of two in the Lutheran Confessions, which concentrate on the church's ancient creeds and historic Reformation faith, and five in dogmatics, which present biblical

teachings within the contemporary scene. These five dogmatics courses cover such topics as how theology is done, also known as prolegomena; the divine character of the Scriptures, which include biblical inspiration and inerrancy, sin, God, Christ's person and work, grace, faith, justification, sanctification, the Sacraments, the church, and the end times. An additional course surveys the beliefs of other denominations in America, a scene that is always changing with the creation of new church bodies and the merging of older ones. Electives in this department take up special topics like apologetics, process theology, and the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theologians who are responsible for the traditional Lutheran character.

Systematic theology depends on the church's doctrinal heritage as it is elucidated in historical theology. *Sola scriptura* is presented in the light of the church's confessions. Systematic theology does not start off from scratch, but it builds on the church's faith as preserved by the apostles in the Scriptures and passed on by faithful men and women of God for centuries. Seminary students will soon discover that their knowledge of the biblical languages and their knowledge of the Bible taught in the Department of Exegetical Theology are invaluable for what they learn in systematics. The Greek New Testament is the Bible of choice in dogmatics courses.

Systematic theology stands at the center of the seminary curriculum, because it brings what is taught at the seminary together in preparation for what a pastor does in preaching, teaching, and caring for his congregation. Seminary students who will soon stand

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in the pulpits of Lutheran congregations must be personally convinced that our Confessions are the proper interpretation of the Scriptures. In standing before their congregations, pastors must have the conviction that the Scriptures that rest on the lectern as they preach are the Word of God. Within a Lutheran context, this theological heritage concentrates particularly on the faith embodied in the ancient creeds and Reformation documents collected into the *Book of Concord* of 1580. The Apostles' and Nicene Creeds are still used in the public worship of our congregations. Even the much longer Athanasian Creed is recited on Trinity Sunday as a testimony to our orthodox faith. Luther's Small Catechism, which is the shortstop of our sixteenth century Confessions, still remains the standard textbook in preparing children and adults for full church membership through Baptism and/or Confirmation. In many cases, our members still know Luther's Catechism because of the teaching of faithful pastors. Courses on the Lutheran

Confessions survey these documents and provide a historic component to systematic theology. Seminary students learn the circumstances in the first four centuries when the creeds developed into the forms in which they are used in the church, and familiarize themselves with the events of the sixteenth century when Luther and the other confessors prepared the Lutheran Confessions. Courses taught in the Department of Historical Theology provide a further background. With this knowledge, Lutheran pastors are prepared to lead the members of their congregations in regular worship services and in classes of Christian instruction using Luther's Small Catechism. Thus, at every juncture the two courses in the Lutheran Confessions are practical because pastors in their ministry will be relying on the faith preserved in the creeds and Confessions.

Dogmatics courses on Baptism and the Lord's Supper provide the rationale for the pastor's sacramental service among the people. He will know why chil-

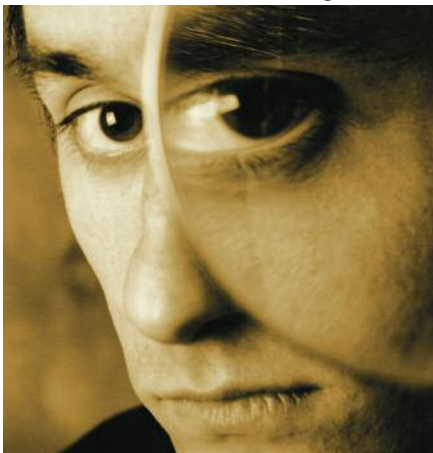
dren should be baptized and the faithful should receive Christ's body and blood. All of these courses prepare the pastor to address the theological questions raised by the people, and pastors will need to address some of these concerns from the pulpit.

At the present time, the Department of Systematic Theology has the most global membership with its professors coming from Germany, Africa, Asia, the former Soviet Union, and, of course, the United States. In addition to teaching in these countries, they have also taught in Australia, Haiti, Latvia, Lithuania, Kazakstan, and others. Three members received all or part of their theological education from German theological faculties, and all have a competence in foreign languages. This is especially valuable in accessing the Lutheran Confessions, whose official version is in German and Latin. Thus, our professors, quite literally, have hands-on experience on how theology is done throughout the world and are trained to address different situations. Two department members are authors of volumes in the *Confessional Lutheran Dogmatics* series, another has written two books in biblical theology, and all have written scholarly and popular articles. They are part of the theological life of the world and are constantly making contributions to it by lectures, articles, and full-length books.

Upon graduation from the seminary, students, who have now become candidates for the Holy Ministry, are required at their ordination to subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions, because these documents are in full agreement with the Holy Scriptures.

Though dogmatics is often seen as a static discipline, it is the most contemporary of all the theological disciplines in addressing situations that the church is now facing. Most Lutheran seminaries in the United States list dogmatics along with courses taught in church history or historical theology. In other seminaries, courses in dogmatics are marginalized or are not included in the theological curriculum at all. In the first dogmatic courses at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, a seminary student hears and learns that particular vocabulary which make up the content of the theological. These courses set the tone of the pastor's ministry for the rest of his life.

The Rev. Dr. David P. Scaer is Chairman and Professor of the Department of Systematic Theology and holds the David P. Scaer Chair of Systematic and Biblical Theology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.



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