

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

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A Critique of Theological Education in the Light of Changing American Culture

By DAVID S. SCHULLER

The more critical the situation faced by a ministry, the more intense has been its criticism of conventional theological education. Where the patterns of cultural change have been least severe, the conventional shape of ministerial training has been most successful. Turning to the areas of greatest change we find the most demanding tests that can be addressed to contemporary theological education.¹ Moreover, such areas should prove most predictive of the types of change we can look for in the future.

As might be expected, therefore, criticism of the seminaries has been most sharp from men ministering in the inner city and among the "younger churches" of world missions. To the first group seminary training appears unreal, falsely theoretical, and addressed to a parish situation and surrounding culture which no longer exist. Urban pastors grapple daily with lives being crushed by an urbanized, industrialized machine — with the victims never fully understanding the meaning of the entire process. The picture of seminaries pursuing their prescribed ways, repeating customary actions as if they lived in another world, understandably arouses

anger on the part of inner-city clergy.² In the words of a Protestant Episcopalian priest: "Our present seminaries are, in my opinion, the single most serious block to effective urban training for the ordained."³

In the relative simplicity of an earlier day one conjectures greater homogeneity among types of parish ministries. Indeed differences existed between small, static rural stations and large city congregations. Yet a fundamental continuity linking one pastorate with the next seemed apparent. A Lutheran seminary could picture a normative parish. It could then determine the skills requisite for the man who would serve as pastor in that parish. The final step was to fashion a series of courses and learning experiences which would begin to form the theologian-pastor. Over the passing decades a pattern of theological education became normative. Established patterns were followed. The new was evaluated in terms of the old. Elaborate rationalizations were developed to answer the critics who sensed a growing disparity between the theological and pastoral training given in seminaries and the situation of parish and community existing in the world. In spite of minor faculty examinations and major foundation-sponsored en-

¹ Cf., for example, Tom Allan, *The Face of My Parish* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953). Bruce Kenrick, *Come Out the Wilderness: The Story of East Harlem Protestant Parish* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962). C. Kilmer Myers, *Light the Dark Streets* (Greenwich, Conn.: The Seabury Press, 1957).

² Cf. as an example the chapter on Episcopalian seminaries in G. Paul Musselman, *The Church on the Urban Frontier* (Greenwich, Conn.: The Seabury Press, 1960), pp. 26—33.

³ James P. Morton, "The In-Between Men," *The City Church*, XV (Jan.-Feb., 1964), p. 3.

deavors to evaluate church and ministry in relation to theological education,⁴ no great changes occurred. Adjustments were made; new course offerings were added; goals and purposes were reexamined. But with institutional rigidity, the ultimate changes were not too radical. As a result, many who are working in frontier areas of change despair of receiving any substantial aid from the seminaries: ". . . Seminary curricula and teaching are so irrelevant to social change in America, characterized by urbanization, that we can expect no help at all from the seminaries in training men for significant ministries in urban society."⁵

A corroborating voice of critique comes from those who are rethinking the role of theological education in parts of the world where Christians are a militant minority. Historically the missions of established church bodies founded seminaries which basically reproduced the content and even the pedagogies of the parent institution in

the United States. Adaptations were minimal; the major changes were simplification resulting from lack of training, personnel, and resources. Missionaries and native scholars alike now are becoming more critical of patterns of church life which have been exported to them.⁶ Most penetrating is their criticism that demands an investigation of the presuppositions with which the Western church unconsciously operates. World missions are questioning "traditional patterns of congregational life and ministry conceived under the concept of *Corpus Christianum*, [which] are neither true nor relevant."⁷

A change in such basic concepts radically changes the form and function of theological education. The president of Tainan Theological College, for example, considers mission and unity as two key ingredients of a "vital strategic concern for theological education, for in concerning itself with those issues it becomes not just repetitive and imitative of the past, but responds creatively to its entrusted task today—the training for the ministry of a missionary community for today and tomorrow."⁸

It is necessary to understand the spirit of much of this criticism. It is not the sophomoric carping of men who demon-

⁴ Cf. The Survey of Theological Education in the United States and Canada, published in three volumes: H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purposes of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956); H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams, eds., *The Ministry in Historical Perspectives* (1956); H. Richard Niebuhr, Daniel D. Williams, and James M. Gustafson, *The Advancement of Theological Education* (1957). Two recent critiques of theological education are highly useful: Walter D. Waggoner, *Bachelor of Divinity: Uncertain Servants in Seminary and Ministry* (New York: Association Press, 1963). Keith R. Bridston and Dwight W. Culver, eds., *The Making of Ministers: Essays on Clergy Training Today* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964).

⁵ The Rev. Geo. Todd, quoting the reaction of some people to the role of theological education today, in his address "Types and Elements of Training," *Addresses at Conference on Training for the Urban Ministry* (The Department of the Urban Church, Division of Home Mission, National Council of Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.), p. 4.

⁶ For an articulate plea for a more indigenous approach see William J. Danker, *Two Worlds or None — Rediscovering Missions* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964). Cf. also Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* 5th ed. (London: World Dominion Press, 1960), pp. 98—107.

⁷ C. H. Hwang, "A Rethinking of Theological Training for the Ministry in the Younger Churches Today." Mimeographed by the American Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada as part of its Monthly Report for October and December 1962, and January 1963, Second Portion, pp. 2, 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

strate their independence from an educational system by turning upon it in bitter criticism. In a period of massive change people become personally anxious. They live uneasy professional and personal lives with the feeling of being "off balance" and about to fall. This uncomfortable stance produces a desire to place blame. In the case of clergymen, the system of theological education which nurtured them stands by as a handy "whipping boy."

In this study, however, we propose to turn away from the predictable reaction both of "angry young men," and of those whom we would dismiss as "emotionally insecure." As we turn our critical gaze on our system of theological education, we do so in a spirit of honesty, but with love and genuine concern for the entire church.

We shall proceed by placing under eight major headings the criticisms of seminaries. While the system of theological education developed by The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod has retained unique qualities of content, structure, and approach, it will be significant to observe how many of the criticisms addressed to Protestant theological education in general in this country apply with equal force to Lutheran seminaries. It will be equally significant to note the points at which the critique touches us least.

In the symposium which this issue of *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY* represents, the present article attempts to reflect the voices of criticism which are growing in intensity. It will take the additional step of reflecting on the meaning of this criticism for our church. The other articles, in turn, will speak to these issues in terms of the history and projected future of Concordia Seminary.

I. CRITIQUE

1. *Seminaries fail to provide an understanding of the contemporary context in which ministers must work.* Men graduate from seminaries with a highly personalistic view of life. Graduates are trained to work primarily with individuals. They tend to reduce all problems to the level of the individual. This was an adequate approach in the first or the 16th centuries. When one touched the individual, he had reached the center of a simple society. For when each person fully carried out his role as peasant, clergyman, or prince, the whole of a simple community was permeated by the judgment and grace of God.

This simplicity no longer exists.⁹ Another whole level of life has developed in terms of the great collectives of the 20th century. Decisions today are made on various levels of management, labor, and government. As more significant decisions are made at higher, often less personal levels,¹⁰ it becomes necessary to understand how influence is brought to bear on the higher echelons. It is also imperative to understand the role of the individual in these larger power structures. The larger collectivities cannot be reduced to the simple number of individual people who comprise them. They are complex institutions that have an existence and reality apart from the individuals associated with them at any given period. It is gross romanticism to preach to people and deal

⁹ Cf. Gibson Winter, *The New Creation as Metropolis* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1963), pp. 34—64.

¹⁰ For a broad humanistic-sociological introduction to this question, see Joseph Benseman and Bernard Rosenberg, *Mass, Class, and Bureaucracy: The Evolution of Contemporary Society* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

with them as if they were free to initiate action as Christians where they are restricted to the execution of specific types of action within policy limits carefully laid down on a higher level of decision making.

As director of the Institute for Advanced Pastoral Studies, Reuel Howe has worked closely with pastors who sought a sharper definition of their pastoral roles. He became increasingly aware of this deficiency: "So many men seem to act as if they were still living in the 18th or 19th centuries. As a matter of fact, some few of them seem to be living in the 5th or 6th centuries. . . . They do not understand the nature and dynamics of culture, or the processes of social order and how change occurs."¹¹

The result is ineffectiveness and frustration on the part of the pastor. In despair over his failure to reach people and to effect change, he begins to doubt himself; some even begin to doubt the power of God. One is impressed by the fact that within a given individual he frequently finds theological depth and sophistication existing side by side with a glaring naiveté regarding the whole world of social and corporate life. This person's view of the world is restricted by the spectacles of a limited number of theological concepts which may make for a serious misreading of the current social reality in which he is living. There exists a wisdom which recognizes the point at which one does not think only theologically but also sociologically and psychologically.

2. *The approach to the ministry emphasized by the seminaries has been primarily*

¹¹ Reuel L. Howe, "Why Do We Train?" *Addresses at Conference on Training for the Urban Ministry* (1963), p. 2.

to individuals in conditions of special need. This is the corollary to the first criticism. "Pastoral problems," "soul care," "pastoral counseling," "marriage counseling" — all are symptomatic of a seminary's approach to contemporary life. It is directed almost exclusively at the level of the individual, family, and small group. In this process the healthy picture of the pastor as "helper" weakens into an image of a do-gooder who stands on the sidelines of life desiring the best for everyone. It develops into a "victim" psychology. The pastor is effective only as he steps into situations which have deteriorated into problems. He is most effective in aiding the victims of our present industrialized-urbanized culture. Unconsciously his concept of church becomes that of an ambulance nosing slowly through the battlefield after the slaughter is over, offering aid to those who cry out for help.¹²

The typical graduate not only fails to work on a more fundamental level of dealing with problems, but he also generally defends his method as the only "Christian" approach to men in society. Jesus dealt only with individuals; St. Paul made no attempt to change the Roman state; the early Christians dealt with slaves, not with slavery — so he marshals his ar-

¹² "At one time the parson stood at the point of intersection between the communal and private lives of his congregation, representing in his person the wholeness of God's concern for man and the fulfillment of man's life in God. Today the pastor feels the deformation of religious life in being consigned to deal with a private sphere of symptoms rather than a public sphere of causes." Gibson Winter, *The Suburban Captivity of the Churches: An Analysis of Protestant Responsibility in the Expanding Metropolis* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1961), p. 165.

guments. Thus the only approach possible for the early Christians becomes the inexorable model for Christians in the 20th century. The early Christians were politically powerless in an antagonistic age, while we live in a democracy where we are charged with the responsibility of governing.

One might illustrate this point from virtually any area of contemporary life, for the organizational revolution has been far-reaching. The simplicity of organizational life which we knew even a century ago has been transformed into the complex reality of large corporations, massive unions, the towering structures of government, vast and intricate financial institutions, and giant educational institutions. The individual faces these growing monsters with alarm and asks whether there is not the alternative of simplifying again and dealing only with individuals. Those most knowledgeable have given their answer: *There is no alternative*. The logistics of the modern metropolis requires this complex organization of human effort.¹³

The individualistic approach has two additional serious results. The young clergyman denies his own deeper theological insights by viewing the world as composed of the "good people" within his church and those poor unfortunate sinners on the outside who need their help. The radical depths of sin are reduced to offenses against middle-class moral values. Both sin and grace are reduced to manageable, institutional proportions which distort the working of God to the point where they are hardly recognizable. Perry Norton, an

urban planner and dedicated churchman, speaks with feeling of those *ex*-churchmen he has talked to — *ex*-Roman Catholics, *ex*-Lutherans, *ex*-Quakers, *ex*-Episcopalians — who have said in disgust that the church has become so much a "Good People Thing" that they cannot tolerate being associated with it. "They know the arena within which their own sins operate, and they know that the church has but the foggiest notion of the dynamics of these arenas."¹⁴

Second, the clergyman and the church itself are powerless to act except on the superficial level of symptom. One may receive greater satisfaction personally from the distribution of Christmas baskets to the needy, but the fundamental need is to attack the problem on the level of that which causes the cases of poverty to exist in one's community. This approach often involves work on the dreary level of education and housing. It means stirring up existing agencies which are failing to do their job, or gaining support for those hamstrung by a lack of resources. It means working with committees and gaining popular support for given issues. It may involve upsetting vested interests which often are the backbone of support within well-established churches. It involves working with the two facets of civic life which are most fearsome to "Protestants" — politics and power. As Margaret Mead once suggested, in the latter days of Rome a pristine Christian ethic produced a new technical application of Christian love in the first creation of hospitals for the care of the poor; so today our new technology demands new ethical

¹³ Stanley J. Hallet, "Urban Life: the Changing Context of Mission," *The City Church* (Jan.-Feb., 1964), pp. 10—15.

¹⁴ Perry L. Norton, "The Changed Versus the Changing," *The City Church* (Jan.-Feb., 1964), pp. 8, 9.

applications.¹⁵ Otherwise Christian institutions will continue to follow an inappropriate, inadequate, and no longer relevant style of individual Christian charity. In this action they will be surrendering to the "world" the wider goals of feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, and protecting the poor in ways that can lead to the amelioration of hunger, chronic illness, and poverty.

3. *Seminaries are not succeeding in training men to theologize about life as they experience it.* One's reaction at this point may simply be: "All of these criticisms are asking for a more sociological—and less theological—approach to the ministry." Not so. For this is the heart of the third critique. While men are trained quite thoroughly within seminaries to understand theology within given defined categories from the viewpoint of systematics, exegesis, history, etc., they are peculiarly ill equipped to use their theology to interpret their experiences in life. Their theology seems to exist in a separate mental compartment. It is quite usable in the pulpit or classroom, or on a platform. But even the most able men seem baffled when they attempt to interpret concrete issues of public life from a theological point of view. The gap between the classical categories which they learned at the seminary and the specifics of the concrete situation which they confront appears so great that it remains easier to work unconsciously with totally different mental tools than to attempt to integrate both into a single workable unity.

¹⁵ Margaret Mead, "Introduction," Hugh C. White, Jr., *Christians in a Technological Era* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1964), pp. 11 to 23.

As we speak of this type of theological reflection, we need Winter's reminder that reflection is more than adding pious words to secular thoughts about daily happenings. For he holds that "reflection" is a mode of theology particularly appropriate to a secular age. This mode contrasts the former approach of bringing eternal truths down to the present moment with this method of forming our concepts in terms of past and future within the historical process. There are two "moments," Winter suggests, in this process. First we move back to "saving history"; we then move forward to analyze the situation in which we live. Theologizing, then, is this process of interpreting the current situation in the light of the saving history.

The observer of American seminaries gains the impression that they are following a pattern similar to that of the German universities in their study of theology a generation ago. The stress is on the development of an academic, "scientific" theology. The implied or overt suggestion to the student is that one cannot be an adequate Christian pastor without becoming a specialist—to the extent that time will permit—in the major areas of formal theology. Any suggestion that much scholarship of the type currently being fostered within seminaries is useful and significant from a purely scholarly point of view, but not of great moment for the development and work of a parish pastor, is greeted by seminary staffs with thinly veiled scorn for such Philistine thinking.

Because of this gap between "academic" theology and "churchly" theology, the transition between seminary and pastorate appears to be growing more difficult, par-

ticularly for the most sensitive and theologically enlightened graduate.¹⁶ For years he is trained in methodologies which reward the isolation of a specific question of scholarship and the consequent painstaking effort to bring to bear every facet of scholarship to take another step toward answering that question. At the beginning of their seminary careers many are disturbed by the question of relevance. As time passes, they begin to enjoy the discipline enough so that the life of the scholar becomes more and more attractive. Frequently the life of a "minister" becomes correspondingly more threatening. Precisely. For the skills of the pastor, who must have a fundamental competence in the Gospel and over against people and society, are of necessity much broader than those of the man who can specialize in ever narrower avenues of concern.

The current trend of attempting to make each clergyman a scholar to the extent that his abilities and interests will permit should be reexamined. No one voicing this critique questions the need for specialists in depth in each of the fields of theology. But many do seriously question the advisability of forcing every parish pastor into that mold. In this connection, Paul Holmer, professor of theology at Yale, questions the wisdom of requiring seven years of advanced study for a ministerial student. He insists that ". . . a minister is not a scholar; he is preacher and witness to God in Christ and ought not to be

¹⁶ We are concerned that we do not overly generalize here. Young clergymen — as well as those of more mature years — face a multitude of temptations and problems in their professional lives. We would not excuse every pastor with adjustment problems by placing him into this category.

intimidated by such alien academic standards."¹⁷

4. *Where seminaries thus overly professionalize a man, he tends to withdraw from life as it is lived among his people.*¹⁸ We have said that theology is not truly comparable in methodology and content to other disciplines found in a university because theology must remain forthrightly confessional. Furthermore, it is not a special commodity, existing as the sole prerogative of theologians. William Stringfellow, the brilliant young Protestant Episcopal lawyer and churchman, perceptively fears the "academicizing" of theology and the professionalizing of the ordained ministry. One danger he sees is "the vested interest which seminary faculty, seminarians, and the seminary graduates acquire in theology as their specialty and proficiency."¹⁹ The work of theology remains a work of the whole people of God. The current drift toward permitting it to become the special province of the ordained

¹⁷ Paul L. Holmer, "Can We Educate Ministers Scientifically?" in Bridston and Culver, p. 26.

¹⁸ Although addressed to the parish situation in France the words of Abbé Michonneau apply to the American scene: "Our influence upon ordinary people is not what it should be partly because we are so different from them; we think differently, live differently, speak and act differently. In other words, we have a different culture. Our seminary training in the classics, philosophy, and theology has put us in a class apart. . . . What is the result? Usually it means that we feel compelled to surround ourselves with those who will understand our thought and speech, and who have tastes like our own." *Revolution in a City Parish* (Westminster, Md.: The Newman Press, 1961), p. 131.

¹⁹ See Stringfellow's four essays in *A Private and Public Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962).

professional must be withstood by both the ordained professional and the laity.²⁰

Ideally each department of a seminary should have the world and the people of God in mind as it develops the courses which a ministerial student is to take. They are nurturing men to take their positions as leaders, preachers, and teachers of the body of Christ as they make their pilgrimage through the world. As pastors these men must be in exposed positions. They are to be—in one popular expression—“in-between men.” They are not to be between God and men, but between the world unconscious of God and the world made aware of the joy and freedom of the Gospel.

Furthermore the seminary should acknowledge that people today are living in two realms of life—in the public as well as the private sphere.²¹ The residential community with its accents on family life, children, neighborhood, and leisure time is one sphere to which the church's members must witness. But they must witness also to the public sphere of business, commerce, government, and higher education. Because the church's witness has been deficient in the latter realm, significant decisions are often made on the basis of exclusively financial, military, social, productive, and medical considerations. Unconsciously the church is augmenting the “secularizing” of our culture when she en-

²⁰ “A layman is indeed not somebody who has *not* studied theology, who is *not* ordained. Who would like to be labeled such an ‘is not’? One cannot define the laity in this negative way.” Hans-Ruedi Weber, *The Militant Ministry: People and Pastors of the Early Church and Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), p. 18.

²¹ For an attempt to articulate this for the laity, see the present writer's “The Second Revolution,” *This Day*, May 1964, pp. 10–13.

courages private piety apart from public responsibility.

A withdrawal of the church from either the public or the private sphere would be fatal. Her witness currently is much stronger within the private sphere. The call to witness within the public sphere is loud and clear today. Seminary training must face the reality of this bifurcation and nurture its men to live and witness in both spheres.

5. *Current seminary training is likely to produce clergymen who are personally overly sensitive.* “One of my criticisms of theological education,” Reuel Howe has said, “is that students are trained to *know* and to *do*, but not to *be*.”²² The result, he suggests, is that too many men substitute “being a minister” for “being.” A number of problems arise. A man can use the ministry psychologically to bolster a sagging conception of himself. Because he sees little value in himself, an individual can attempt to absorb the office into himself. In a similar false fashion an individual seemingly may sacrifice his health and his family on the altar of self-giving, hard work. One becomes curious about the motivations at work beneath the surface. At times the individual himself, not God, is the one for whom all is sacrificed. Again work becomes the compulsive end in and of itself. The setting of the ministry is quite secondary except that it provides an almost foolproof rationalization.²³

Where the man and the office become one in this negative sense, the individual is unable to accept any criticism of his

²² Howe, p. 1.

²³ Wayne E. Oates, ed., *The Minister's Own Mental Health* (Great Neck, N. Y.: Channel Press, 1961).

work—for this is a criticism of himself. A hint of criticism may throw him into near panic. Such clergymen develop a pattern of life in which they avoid the pain of criticism as much as possible. They protect themselves from any situation which may prove threatening. To avoid criticism, they carefully pursue courses of action that will meet with approval and not arouse any hostilities.²⁴ Failing to perceive the inevitability of resistance and conflict in the face of any significant change, they cautiously choose the safe paths of action and thought where agreement has long since been won. They fail to appreciate the potential role of controversy within the church as an educative process and a means for group action.

The corollary to this pattern is that such men avoid deep and meaningful contact with people. They begin to restrict their contacts to those whose wholehearted acceptance and approval has been assured. They venture only into those social situations where their position is recognized and respected. Finally they cut themselves off from more and more fruitful contacts with life where important decisions are made. Even the most restricted contact within their pastorates begins to lose its vitality, for in their attempt to have everyone approve them, they are unable to move with the freedom necessary to speak judgment as well as grace. They become those very "nice" but ineffectual people who wouldn't hurt anyone. In attempting to save their lives, they have lost them.

²⁴ "Equally tempting is the inclination to turn away in hurt bewilderment from those who are aggressively hostile, who make the pastor an object of bitter and often unjustifiable criticism." Paul Rowntree Clifford, *The Pastoral Calling* (Great Neck, N. Y.: Channel Press, 1961), p. 43.

6. *Seminary training is oriented to specific sets of institutional patterns.* Perhaps at this point we need to remind ourselves that no one seminary is beset by all of these tendencies. In their very nature some tend to balance others. Particularly when we arrive at this criticism, a number of seminary men will arise to protest. For they feel that if anything characterizes seminary staffs and students today, it is a hearty criticism of the institutionalized church. One cannot live within a seminary community without becoming aware of the truth of this defense. Recent years have experienced strong student rebellion against many aspects of the organized life of the church. Probably a majority of students today are highly critical of their own denomination. Denominational executives in particular come in for a heavy barrage of criticism. Informal discussions express concern over the continued trend toward greater centralization in denomination and seminary. Seminary administrators find that they must spend a considerable amount of time and effort in interpreting policies to the student body. References to given areas of administration on various levels of the life of the church are greeted on occasion with rather irreverent laughter. Students tend to be impatient with demands of local denominational loyalty which curtail a witness to the Gospel. Many of them are intrigued by any experimental nonstructured form of ministry—regardless of how bizarre or ineffectual it proves to be in the long run.

Granting all of these facts, an objective analysis still finds seminary training consciously or unconsciously pointed toward organizational patterns which appear more significant for the past than for the future.

The relatively static, semiagrarian, predominantly "Protestant," solidly middle-class parish located in a smaller city of the Midwest is the unconscious model which often seems to appear behind the curriculum as the point toward which the graduate is being propelled. While a few courses may jar a student into an awareness of a world stridently in conflict with the former model, the institutional juggernaut lumbers along its predestined path without any great change.

This produces a strain within the seminary. Students often find that some of their most exciting professors in fields of Biblical specialties balk uncomfortably when asked about the implications of a given insight for the life of the church today. His suggested solutions obviously are drawn from parish life as he vaguely feels it is being lived—at times in sharp divergence from the very point which he has been making. Or he takes the leap of describing an ideal pattern which has a certain "Alice in Wonderland" ring about it. In either case this indicates to the student who is looking toward the parish ministry that he had better stick to the established pattern; the other obviously is in the realm of vague theory.

7. *Emphases in seminary training often no longer match the needs of the changed cultural scene.* Protestant critics point to the centrality of the pulpit as the main focus of the church's operation. Emerson Smith, a Methodist, suggests at this point: "The great mistake is trying to equate pulpitering with preaching the Gospel. The two are not the same."²⁵ The most valid

test again presents itself in the areas of greatest cultural change; for example, in the midst of urban change and academic communities. In each case the role of preaching has changed radically from 20 years ago, when the accent was on certain popular preachers known and admired for their pulpit work.

The Word of God is not to be proclaimed less. It is to be proclaimed as fully and as relevantly as possible.²⁶ Often this means proclamation through avenues other than the vested preacher who stands behind the solid protection of great blocks of oak or marble. For many denominations this means that preaching must be an exposition of the Word of God from the Bible in a much more direct and humble fashion. When the faithful gather together for nurture, they expect and need more than interesting social analysis, literary commentary, psychological insight, recitations of poetry, flowing sentimentalities, and exciting and/or amusing tales. As one means of correction, theologically alert pastors within the Lutheran Church have been reemphasizing the importance of the sacraments and the role of mutual conversation and consolation of brethren. Thus the Word is spread among the faithful in an inner-city congregation more frequently in ways apart from the remnant of people gathered before a pulpit on a Sunday morning. The critics in such a setting humbly submit that their seminary training should have reflected more accurately the patterns of life as they now are living them.

8. *Seminaries fail when they do not in-*

²⁵ Emerson W. Smith, "On Bridging the Gap," in *The City Church*, XV (Jan.-Feb. 1964), pp. 5, 6.

²⁶ Langdon Gilkey, *How the Church Can Minister to the World Without Losing Itself* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964). Note especially Chapter 4, "Hearers of the Word."

still an awareness that clergymen must continue to learn. One of the less publicized revolutions within this decade is taking place in education. A major source lies in the current explosion of knowledge. While one remains slightly suspicious of sweeping statistical generalizations which are virtually impossible to verify, a current comparison highlights the scope of this increase. If one considers all of the "facts" known to humanity from the beginning of recorded time to the year 1950, he discovers a doubling of this knowledge between 1950 and 1960. Further, at the present rate of increase, this body of knowledge soon will be doubling every five years. In many areas of study, scholars are having ever greater difficulty in keeping up with the sheer increase in a single subfield within their particular discipline. The "recall of knowledge" is one of the areas of greatest concern for those working in the field of cybernetics. Plans for future libraries with systems of automated bibliography buildings are breathtaking to the present scholar.

An educator said in a recent address: "If any man stops his education for a period of 10 years — regardless of the level at which he stopped, sixth grade or Ph.D. — he is an uneducated man!" This applies to the ministry as well. One is distressed in pastoral gatherings to hear men who ceased solid intellectual growth 20 years ago still make the indignant claim that they are "authorities in religion" — on a par with any other professional in the country today. My own observation leads me to believe that seminaries have been doing an increasingly effective job in this area. The younger clergy appear much more alert and aware. The majority are continuing to read seriously. A few are pursuing some program

of continued study. This is imperative for the professional life of the clergyman today.

In a survey concluded in June 1962, the National Opinion Research Center found that over 17 million adults were enrolled in some adult education course during the preceding year. An additional 9 million were engaged in some type of systematic independent study; a final 2,650,000 were enrolled as full-time students.²⁷ Many seminaries currently are at work projecting plans for bringing back their graduates on a regular basis — perhaps every 10 years — for a major "refresher." Moreover, institutes and seminars in some depth are being contemplated on a regular basis for each section of the country. Correspondence school courses are being reevaluated as another means for continued study.

II. COMMENTARY

The barrage of criticism directed against seminaries is part of a larger pattern of evaluation and self-analysis which characterizes the church in America in the 1960s. Those who are most critical of church life in the community are also most critical of the seminaries. Men like Gibson Winter, Donald Benedict, and Peter Berger²⁸ are dismayed with the way in which churches have accommodated themselves to their surrounding culture. They feel that the local parish or congregation is no longer a useful form for meeting the reality of the new society developing about us. Logically, then, these men are vociferous critics of

²⁷ "Continuing Education for Adults," Publication of the Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, March 31, 1963, No. 32.

²⁸ Peter L. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies; Christian Commitment and the Religious Establishment in America* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Company, 1961).

conventional seminary training, which still posits the parish as the basic unit within the Christian church.

Winter states his opinion bluntly that unless seminaries undergo the discipline of asking the most fundamental questions about their existence and purpose in the future, in the light of the institutional crisis within Christendom, they are in danger of fast becoming museums. He comes to the seminary-shattering conclusion that "theological education can no longer be thought of as preparation of a 'set-apart' ministry. . . Professional training has no relevance without institutions in which professionals may exercise their vocations."²⁹

In Winter's analysis the parish is no longer a viable expression of the Christian faith; by definition there is little point in training men as professionals with the practical training for an institutional framework which no longer exists. He is concerned with servanthood as the central concept of what the church should minister to our world. "The task of theological reflection depends, therefore, upon discerning the depth and the truth in every field and encouraging every ministry, while waiting upon the disclosure of those ministers through which our new society can be hallowed and lifted up."³⁰

Personally I am most sympathetic to Winter's call for servanthood. But I am not willing to set aside the congregation as a basic unit of the church. There will be an increasing number of locales and areas of public concern that will necessitate radically different institutional forms of ministry.

²⁹ Gibson Winter, "Theological Schools: Partners in the Conversation," *The Making of Ministers*, p. 163.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

However, for the foreseeable future the congregation remains the unit which would make possible these newer forms of ministry. In the accent of critics like Winter upon the church in its dispersed form, one wonders whether they have begun to overlook the necessity for the church in its assembled form. Mission and service must remain linked to worship and nurture.

Recognizing, then, the broad spectrum represented by the foregoing critiques, these final observations should be made.

First, in the light of the rapid changes within our culture, it is imperative that the seminary continue to define its goals. Forms crystallize all too quickly. Cultural accidents of one period are apt to become sacred to succeeding generations. In the process, the presuppositions of theological and pastoral training must be articulated as clearly as possible. By way of simple illustration: Many pastors lament the fact that in American churches generally each year sees fewer men with a vocation to the *parish* ministry. If the parish remains the only authentic expression of the ministry of Jesus Christ in the 20th century, then this drift is indeed lamentable. But if the form of the parish as we knew it historically is no longer capable of serving whole areas of contemporary life, obviously other forms can and must be fashioned which will serve more adequately.

Second, the problem of the seminary is intensified because it involves a task of definition for the whole church. It becomes obvious that the problem confronting us is but another aspect of the question of church and ministry. The question posed concerning the forms of the ministry for which seminaries should train cannot be answered by seminaries in isolation from

the church. In spite of all the recent investigations into the nature of the church and the role of the people of God, we have not answered the question of the role of the "set-apart" ministry in relation to this broader ministry.

Third, most seminaries designed their programs as a process of training men to become theologian-pastors. The objectives of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, for example, speak of acquiring "the academic knowledge and the professional skills required for the effective exercise of the sacred ministry of the Word. . . ." ³¹ In the past the curricula of most Lutheran seminaries sought to produce first of all a theologian. Practical courses were few and often were compounded of Biblical deductions, pastoral reminiscences, synodical caveats, and a healthy dose of common sense. Recent years have seen a rapid proliferation of courses directed toward specialized ministries. The introduction and spread of these courses were faced with frankly mixed feelings. While a man may perform various tasks within the ministry in a variety of radically different cultural settings, "in every instance he is to be first of all a theologian. He has no other reason for separate vocational existence." ³² The role of cultural education, skill training, the training for a growing number of specializations must be defined.

Fourth, it is necessary to note that recent critiques of seminaries are quite different from the older criticism which simply emphasized action and loudly demanded more "practical" training, spelled out in every-

thing from mimeographing to advanced courses in business management. Recent critiques arise from a deep awareness of the church as the body of Christ. They are theologically based.³³ Critics are sensitive to the sacramental and liturgical ministries of the church. Their concern arises from the dislocations which they sense between the Biblical and confessional definitions of the ministry and the ministries which they see being carried out within acculturated communities and in crisis situations where the church is having great difficulty in making meaningful contact with people.

Fifth, realism demands that we no longer see the seminary as the only agency for ministerial training. Many of the criticisms could be met with a careful program of in-service training. More training must be done—not in isolation from the world on secluded seminary campuses—but in the midst of the problem areas.³⁴ One of the most significant of these ventures is the Urban Training Center, which began its work in the fall of 1964. To this Center,

³³ Cf. Paul Tillich, "The Relevance of the Ministry in Our Time and Its Theological Foundation," Hans Hofmann, ed., *Making the Ministry Relevant* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), pp. 17—35.

³⁴ In his writings Winter has emphasized that theological reflection and ministering can no longer be insulated from another. There needs to be faculty involvement at crucial points with the men whom they are preparing for the ministry and constant dialog about the specific role of their own discipline in the mission of the church. He contends that the development of the church's ministry cannot be confined any longer to a training of clergy in isolation from the laity. For training for the ministry is training in apostolate and servanthood; thus it should not be conducted in isolation from that context. In fact, ministry and mission are actually to be developed in the process of training; this becomes the joint task of faculty, students, pastors, and laymen.

³¹ "Objectives," *Concordia Seminary Catalog*, 1963—64, p. 18.

³² Martin E. Marty, "Cultural Education Is Pretheological," *The Making of Ministers*, p. 134.

located in the midst of the transitional areas of Chicago, clergymen can come for periods of one, three, or nine months' duration for intensive training in aspects of the church's ministry in the inner city. To face the criticism that seminaries are training men for an "unreal" world, more training must be designed to involve direct engagement and involvement in the world.

Sixth, seminaries must take seriously the call for a dialogical versus a monological conception of communication within the ministry. Monolog remains appallingly prevalent in the church, as Reuel Howe reminds us. The ministries of many men still are hampered because they do not know how to sit down with people to aid them in thinking through their problems. This calls for more than a few additional hours of training in counseling. It grows from a changed conception of the role of the clergyman in the midst of the people of God. Howe comments: "We need to train ministers in the skills of counseling, of referral, of cooperation with other professions, of political and community action, of training lay leaders. . . ." ³⁵

Seventh, seminaries must investigate the processes by which they will be able to pursue the scientific study of theology and yet keep alive within their students the warmth and passion necessary for a true minister. One turns cold before examples of warm, friendly young men who entered the seminary to become pastors, but who at the end of four years are sophisticated, overbearing individuals, interested only in

continued graduate study. They inform you that they could no longer be happy as mere parish pastors. When seminaries define their objective as the education of "theologians," that term demands further definition. For the continued scientific study of religion does not bring a man closer to any ministry of service to people, either personally or professionally. Some seminaries, especially interdenominational graduate divinity schools, now find that the majority of their students no longer have any intention of entering the parish ministry. A greater percentage of their students are in the category of "seekers"—those who study theology in an attempt to find answers to the basic questions of life, of their own existence. While this is not, or at least not yet, as true of denominational seminaries, changes affecting the undenominational schools are reflections of basic cultural patterns that may wash through the more protected schools faster than one might suspect.

A breach has developed between the seminaries and the churches—on the level of the local congregation as well as the denomination. Each is critical of the other. But dialog has begun. Each is concerned about genuine renewal and honest ministry. This profile of criticism comes from those who really want a faithful, effective ministry of the Word of God to our generation. With humility and hope the seminaries listen. After the exaggerations are pared away and the personal anxieties removed, the real kernel of genuine criticism remains.

St. Louis, Mo.

³⁵ Howe, p. 2. Cf. also his *The Miracle of Dialogue* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1963).