

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

Imambu Epe—The Good Spirit

H. KARL REKO

Dukedom Large Enough

JAROSLAV PELIKAN

“Your Job, Mr. President . . .”

DAVID S. SCHULLER

The Task of the Theological Professor

ARTHUR C. REPP

Theological Education: The Ecumenical Dimension

THOMAS COATES

Toward Preparing Equippers

HERBERT M. ZORN

The Relationship Between Graduate Theological

Education and the Worldwide Mission

of the Church

WILLIAM J. DANKER

Masters in the Making

ALFRED VON ROHR SAUER

Homiletics

Book Review

Vol. XLIII

May

Number 5

“Your Job, Mr. President . . .”

DAVID S. SCHULLER

The author is associate director of the American Association of Theological Schools and formerly served as professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

Good humor and a certain salty Lutheran irreverence are necessary on the day of a presidential inauguration to make sure we don't believe every exaggeration spoken in the excitement of the occasion. You may remember the inauguration of a university president some years ago. After two days of festivities and speeches suggesting that the fate of half of Western culture revolved about the decisions that would be made by the new president, a friend put his hand on his shoulder and said, "Look, George, forget all that stuff. You have three main jobs: to provide parking for the faculty, football for the alumni, and sex for the students."

Our day is light-years away from that occasion. A revolution has taken place as we have gone about our jobs in the last five years. Part of the population is unaware of this dramatic change; another sector is actively fighting it; still others are bewildered by it and only want to pass their days in relative peace and security. But no one involved enough with the life of a theological seminary to be in this room now dares to fall into this category. Well, then, as we put our hand on this president's shoulder and say, "Look, Dick, you have three main jobs," what do we point to?

The answer can be cast in a variety of ways. Since much of what has already been

said, however, has been cast in theological categories, let me speak from an educational stance.

I. FRESH SENSITIVITY TO STUDENTS

Any president who expects to be in office on the first anniversary of his inauguration had better look first — with sensitivity, courage, and a long view of history — at his students. In the distant days of the past — prior to five years ago — we still quaintly thought of students as consumers of the educational process. How well I remember the professorial paternalism that asked about what we were doing for "the little boys from Nebraska."

Today we know that the boys from Nebraska are part of an identifiable subculture that has begun to take seriously the rhetoric of the American dream and of the life under the Gospel. They are part of a movement that refuses to accept our uneasy rationalizations and necessary compromises. Their identification with the dispossessed in this country and throughout the Third World proves so unsettling because they demand action where we have been content with words and hopes.

And some of the boys from beyond Nebraska come from homes where their parents have "made it" in the best tradition of the American dream. They have scaled the pyramids of government, business,

finance, and the professions. Their parents are highly educated; they have money and a degree of power. But their children are asking whether the prize is worth it. They are not sure their fathers are happy human beings, fulfilled creatures, men who can hold their heads high because of what they have given to the quality of human life. Above all, they are not sure that the high price paid worldwide for our postindustrial culture can be justified. Rejecting the advertisers' view of modern American life, they see the price paid in the reduction of freedom, the unabating growth of bureaucracy, the ravaging of our planet, and the continued poisoning of the thin envelope of air that sustains us.

Look at these students. They are part of more than seven million young people who are enrolled full or part time in institutions of higher education. Over against their fathers a generation before them, they are at the time they graduate from high school a year more mature physiologically and more than a year more advanced intellectually. Taken as a whole they are brighter, better read, far more experienced, more affluent, and have been exposed to more of the world.

They are, furthermore, part of a select number of slightly over 30,000 young people who are studying theology professionally. Their college years covered the period during which an unanticipated movement developed. Living at the pinnacle of development in rational, scientific, technological society, we expected a continued movement toward a day in which logic and the scientific method would rule. But this generation revolted. It rejected any hyper-rationalist world as dehumanizing; it denounced any system that could produce the

mass madness of war as a continuing style of national life. To our amazement it appeared that those who had had the finest education our society could arrange were the most disillusioned. They rebelled against concern with questions of method to the exclusion of concern with ends. They turned with suspicion from science that was failing to confront the most serious questions confronting the globe. In contrast to their fathers they turned toward a style of life that sought authenticity, honesty, openness toward others, and a new sensitivity toward emotions and personal experience.

And most strange of all, while theologians wrote about "modern" man's desire to live in a totally desacralized cosmos, the elitist vanguard of this student generation turned phrenetically to any belief system that offered salvation from the sterility of positivism.

Mr. President, over 375 representatives of that generation—some of whom have admittedly offered alternate responses to these same factors—are now sitting in the classrooms of Concordia Seminary here in Springfield. They are asking where and how the Christian faith comes as an answer to the crippling personal and social problems of our day. What a risk! The best of this generation rejected science because it proved unable to handle the gut issues of today. How will they respond as they watch you as a theological community struggling to fashion the answers on the anvil of theology?

II. FRESH SENSITIVITY TO THE CHURCH

If your first glance is inward within the academic community, your second glance must be outward to the churches and the

world to which they seek to minister. Even those who view the Missouri Synod with a look reserved for odd sect-type enclaves might envy the relationship that the Concordias have with a church body and its constituent congregations. At best the churches look to their seminaries as fellow servants, with love and a degree of respect, with strong financial support, and in sharp dialog with the ideas ever fomenting in an intellectual center. At its worst such a relationship becomes one of oppressive, authoritarian control of the school that will eventuate in a safe but mediocre faculty that would not be able to receive an appointment at another theological school in the country.

What is involved, then, in a fresh sensitivity to the church at this moment? First, this sensitivity will prevent you from falling into the trap of providing a quality of leadership that seeks primarily to "play it safe." When the bombs are exploding, the safest course is not to seek to move but wait out the period in your own cozy bomb shelter. But the best projections of the future foresee a period in which the bombs are going to be exploding for a long time. Thus this course will be safe but ultimately deadly because it will prevent any confrontation with the issues facing us in each realm of life. It will guarantee that those who forecast the death of theological seminaries as viable institutions will be proved correct. Here the one who seeks to save an institution's life by avoiding the theological, ecclesiastical, and educational confrontations will guarantee its death. There is something reminiscently Biblical in the process.

Positively, this sensitivity will recognize anew the mutual interdependence that a

seminary and a church body experience. Each is dependent on a function best performed by the other. The situation of seminaries which have slowly grown away from a church demonstrates conclusively that a seminary must have its roots planted in a living, worshipping community of the people of God. The church in turn needs some segment of its community to aid it in its theological task of conserving, constructing, and evaluating. Theology does have a *conserving* function which might well be served by a theological school. The past several years in the life of the church have demonstrated again that one can be tyrannized by the present as easily as by the past. The more seriously a church seeks to meet its own era, the more necessary it is that voices be raised reminding it of its heritage, of great insights into Scripture and the Confessions perhaps currently overlooked, and of its resources.

The church today continues to need someone to perform the *constructive* tasks of theology. The church is ever in danger of withdrawing into an ecclesiastical ghetto where slowly its mission is choked off. It has happened repeatedly in the history of the church. Thus the church needs to hear the voices of those who are struggling with the political, fiscal, environmental, and productive concern of life. They need what the churchman and theologian can bring to their decisions; the church needs this base of reality if it will speak anything more than an antiquarian word to our day.

But the church needs some group to remain slightly outside the fray in order to continue to monitor its life, to speak the word of correction to it as it skews its life or message in response to the unique

pressures of the moment. We are all brilliant in our ability to analyze the errors of the past. One immersed in the life of the church at its frontiers today is less likely to be sensitive to the pitfalls about him.

But the seminary needs the life-sustaining contact with the church. If we are truly engaged in preparing men for ministry, we must be sensitive to where and how ministry can best be provided in our world. Mr. President, do you agree that this school must do more than train ministers who will become pliable denominational yes-men or those who will dance to the tune of every passing fad? Do you agree that the study of theology alone can no longer prepare a man for leadership as a "minister" within the church? Theology can no longer be interpreted as a package of dogmas and doctrines that can simply be "applied" to the modern setting. Other professions are searching for aid in establishing values and norms in a secular society as they seek to answer the most profound and awesome questions of life, death, and meaning. It is, then, the responsibility of a seminary like this one to produce leaders capable of filling these exacting roles.

III. FRESH SENSITIVITY TO THE WORLD

There is no need today for a glowing final moment that suggests that a seminary must be in vital contact with the world beyond its academic community or the community of its own churchly fellowship. This has become a given and needs no debate or encouragement. But what are its implications? In looking freshly at this area, may I raise two concerns?

First, Mr. President, how do you respond to the statement in the recent report on

theological education presented to the Board for Higher Education that states: "On the larger scene the whole educational apparatus of seminaries segregated from all other Christians in total sectarian isolation and instructed wholly by a faculty of a particular persuasion is coming to look more and more like an anachronism rather than an instrument to serve the needs of the contemporary church." I thoroughly agree with this conviction that if you seek to educate men to be ministers within the Lutheran Church that they will be able to establish a confessional identity of strength and persuasion but without defensiveness to the extent that they have been open to the insights—the sensitivities, strengths, and weaknesses—of other historic traditions. Practically we now know that this process demands regular and intensive contacts with students and professors of other denominations during the period of their theological training. What does this mean concretely in the planning for this school?

Sensitivity to ministry in the world finally demands that a school ask itself whether its task in the future will simply be to continue to "turn out men for the ministry." When this is translated into a truism, everyone will nod in profound agreement: A first-rate theological school is designed to educate men for ministry in our rapidly changing society. This demands a two-pronged process. On the one hand theology will be the heartbeat of the institution. There will be a serious attempt to develop methodologies by which an answer can be given regarding God's will for specific questions in contemporary life. There will be a deep commitment to living with the Word of God personally, profes-

sionally, and institutionally. On the other hand it demands close and immediate contact with specific sectors of life. This contact can no longer be generalized and vague. This process probably demands some conscious specialization. No single school can command the resources to pretend to train men across great varieties of ministries. It demands utilizing contacts in depth with specific segments of the offices, agencies, businesses, or industries of a given community. It will draw upon the additional specialization available in university departments as they seek segmental knowledge across the frontiers of understanding. It means answering the question of the role of this school only in the context of theological education within our church body, within this region of the country, and finally within the setting of the total enterprise of theological education on the continent.

After all of this gratuitous advice, permit me to end on a more personal note. These

have been the most trying days for college and seminary presidents in the history of our country. The growth of "executive fatigue" and the rate of presidential resignations is staggering. Some of the best men have been driven from their jobs. Some weaker men have resigned in bewilderment and despair.

You have a resource. God has called you to this post. You have become one of His gifts to this school and indirectly to all of us in the church. You can stand in the courage of recognizing your strengths and your limitations. It means using the one with the freedom and abandon that comes through the Gospel. It means recognizing the latter with the awareness of God's grace and daily forgiveness. We cannot do better than close with the benediction that dismisses one of our new orders of the Eucharist: "Go, serve the Lord. You are free."

Dayton, Ohio