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# In God for the World

JOHN H. TIETJEN

Thank you, those of you who shared just now in the official inauguration act. I am deeply grateful to you for your kind words and your warm encouragement. Thanks to all of you who have come here today, some representing educational institutions and ecclesiastical organizations, others simply representing yourselves. I am grateful to all of you for honoring Concordia Seminary and its presidential office with your presence. I am personally overwhelmed by the occasion and by the honor I have of serving as president of a seminary with so distinguished a history.

I trust you are all aware that I did not run for the office that has been conferred on me! I confess that even after two months on campus I have some difficulty adjusting to the title of president. As many of you know, my preparation for this office was not by way of major previous experience in the educational field, but through whatever training God in His wisdom provided in a diverse spectrum of other vocations. Therefore, I am not about to deliver any sort of "State of the Seminary" address. My inaugural remarks are not going to lay down a Tietjen platform for the future of Concordia Seminary. My own education has to proceed quite a bit farther before I dare try speculating about long-range plans.

An inaugural address, however, ought at least in some way indicate what lies ahead. I am prepared to tell you how I see things

at this particular moment in the seminary's history. I would like to share with you what I think the chief objective of Concordia Seminary ought to be and, therefore, what I judge to be the determining factor for the seminary's future shape. As I see it, Concordia Seminary's chief objective should be to help the church achieve its mission of bringing God's life to the world. And that objective ought to determine what the seminary is and does.

Perhaps the point is so obvious that it comes out sounding like a cliché. But the issue is far from settled. The seminary could have other primary objectives, and these could determine its future shape.

One objective could spring from institutional pride. A primary goal could be the creation of "the" Lutheran seminary in America. The idea isn't so farfetched. I have heard sounds that could be interpreted as favoring such an objective. I note from our church literature that we take a good deal of pride in the size of our seminary institution. We like to say that we are the largest Lutheran seminary in the United States, and sometimes we make more grandiose claims that are less true. We take pride, too, in our reputation for confessional commitment, for theological orthodoxy, and for the quality of our theological training. We do have great things going for us: fine facilities, a dedicated and competent faculty, a committed student body, and excellent library. Our motto, "Toward a More Excellent Ministry," reflects our concern for quality in theological education. Out of the raw ingredients of concern for size, appreciation for confessional commitment, and interest in excel-

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*This is the inaugural address delivered by President John H. Tietjen at Concordia Seminary Chapel-Auditorium Nov. 10, 1969, as part of the weeklong celebration of his inauguration.*

lence it wouldn't take much to hammer out a primary objective that calls for the creation of the model Lutheran seminary. I have no quarrel with preserving tradition or increasing size, and excellence is always a worthy objective. But such goals ought not be primary. They should rather be the components of a much more encompassing objective.

Another primary objective might focus on the internal affairs of the church. After all, the church needs clergy to lead its worship and perform its sacraments and help manage its affairs. It has happened before in the church's history: a church in a particular place lost sight of its God-given mission to the world, and its seminaries saw their purpose purely as supportive of the church's internal life. In our own time the church has gone on the defensive. It isn't making much progress numerically. Its influence is on the wane. It is continually being hounded by charges of hypocrisy and irrelevance. As a result it has become preoccupied with itself — with institutional survival and ecclesiastical self-preservation. Our seminary could share the church's preoccupation with itself and see its primary goal as one of helping the church survive. An objective like that would have far-reaching effects on what the seminary is and does. The seminary is, of course, an institution of the church in existence to help the church. But its primary purpose has to be more encompassing.

Another objective could issue from the political situation of the church body to which the seminary belongs. Quite frankly, there are some in The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod who are not at all happy with Concordia Seminary and the influence

it has been having on the church. Though it is not true, they have concluded that the seminary has left the church's doctrinal moorings. They are insisting that the seminary be brought into line with the only theological position they consider possible in the church: their own. These forces are not without their influence and power. So the advice comes from many quarters: trim your sails to the prevailing political winds. Should that be the objective which determines what Concordia Seminary is and does? Of course, there is another whole group in the church who have totally different views. They see the seminary as the theological center and rallying point for progressive and constructive change in the Missouri Synod. They might like to see the seminary serve as leader against what they fear could be a reactionary, right-wing take-over of the synod. Shall the seminary march to the beat of that political drum? Is the voice of the people — whether on the right or on the left or in the magic center — indeed the voice of God? I suggest that the seminary must find its primary objective in a source other than the prevailing political situation. It must find its calling in the plan and purpose of God even as its seal, so beautifully reproduced on today's program cover, calls it to look for "light from above."

The illustrations I have given show, I think, that the seminary's primary objective need not be all that obvious. Now back to my original point: the seminary's primary objective should be to help the church achieve its mission of bringing God's life to the world. What is the seminary's reason for being? To provide the church with a trained clergy. But for what

purpose a trained clergy? To help the church fulfill its mission to the world. And why that mission? What is its purpose? That God may be able to share His life with men. The ultimate objective of the seminary is the ultimate goal of the church's mission: that men might share in the new life God makes it possible for them to live.

Both the seminary and the church exist because of a plan and an action of God. God wants to share His life with men. At the dawn of history He chose one people from among the nations of the earth to be His own and to share life with Him. Through this nation He promised to bring blessing to the whole world. In the course of time there came One from that chosen nation, God's Anointed, His Servant, His Son, through whom God acted to fulfill His promise of bringing the blessing of His life to the world. Jesus Christ lived that men might have life and might have it more abundantly. He proclaimed the coming of God's rule and called men to live under it. Through His acts of healing He exhibited the effects of God's powerful presence in human life. He died as a result of man's sins in order to atone for them to make possible the establishment of fellowship between man and God. He rose from the dead to exhibit the new life God now offers men. The ultimate outcome of Christ's life was the outpouring of His Spirit on men to transform and renew their lives. Today God wants men to share in His new creation. He wants to transform our lives with His own so that body and soul, individually and in community, we experience the quality of life He intended for us from the beginning. Already now He makes it possible for us to share

in the newness of life that will be ours fully and perfectly in the life of the world to come.

God expects those with whom He shares His life to be the instruments by which His life is shared with others. Jesus Christ Himself lived to share God's life with men. The church He established understood that its mission was to pass on the life it had received. Today, too, the church must see the sharing of God's life with men as the ultimate goal of its many and varied functions. According to the classic Reformation formula, the church's task is to proclaim the Gospel and to administer the sacraments. That's right, but for the purpose of sharing God's life with men. The ancient church summarized the church's task by means of the broad functions of *leitourgia*, *diakonia*, and *marturia*. Worship, service, and witness, however, were always for the purpose of sharing God's life with the world.

If we today could keep the ultimate objective of the church's mission in mind, we might be able to avoid some of our hangups about what the church's real tasks are. Preaching the Gospel and social action are not incompatible ecclesiastical functions. Of course the church's task is to preach the Gospel, but for a purpose: that men might experience the renewing power of the life of God. As Jesus accompanied a teaching ministry with works of healing, so the church has the responsibility of acting and doing to make life whole. That is what happens when men share in the life of God. But the ultimate objective of sharing God's life is not achieved by social welfare programs alone. The person who shares God's life has more than a healthy body and a full stomach and a good com-

munity in which to live. He has the mind of Christ, and his body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. If the church keeps its ultimate objective clearly in mind, it will know what to do to achieve its mission. It will preach and teach and worship and administer sacraments, and it will serve and act and help and perform deeds of love, both through its individual members and as a community. It won't have time to worry much about itself. It will be too busy reaching out to help countless people throughout the world.

The point I am making is that the purpose of Concordia Seminary has to be seen in relation to the church's mission and its ultimate objective of bringing life to men. The church needs an ordained clergy to help it fulfill its mission. Of course, the task of sharing God's life is the responsibility of all of God's people. The function of the clergy, the letter to Ephesians reminds us, is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. By equipping people for ministry, clergy help the church achieve its mission. But clergymen also represent the church. As appointed spokesmen they embody the church's mission and in a special way function in behalf of the church in its work of sharing God's life with the world. Concordia Seminary exists to help provide the church with an ordained ministry. We are one of only two seminaries in The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, and that fact places considerable responsibility on us. But it is not right to limit our responsibility to the Missouri Synod alone. Our founding fathers, in the constitution they drafted for the Synod, saw one of the Synod's functions to be training pastors for the Evangelical Lutheran Church, not just for the Missouri

Synod alone. To this day our seminary functions to provide the church with candidates for ministry who share the commitment of the Lutheran confessional writings. With such a commitment they give service not just to one church body but to the holy Christian church. And through its School for Graduate Studies the seminary provides churchmen from other denominations with an opportunity to study theology from the perspective of the confessional position of the Church of the Augsburg Confession.

Let me summarize what I have said so far. Concordia Seminary's primary purpose should not derive from institutional pride or relate to the purely internal affairs of the church or take its direction from prevailing political conditions. The seminary's primary purpose should be to help the church fulfill its mission of sharing God's life with the world. Now the point I want to make in the remainder of my address today: the objective of helping the church accomplish its mission should determine the seminary's future shape. From that objective we should derive what the seminary will be and will do.

The seminary's objective should determine our self-understanding as an educational institution. How should we understand ourselves? What is a seminary? A professional school or a school of theology? Is it like a law or medical school, designed to produce a professional clergy? Or is it more like a school of arts and sciences in which basic questions of life are dealt with in a theological context? Should the stress be on the theological diploma which qualifies for the church's ministry or on the gaining of a degree? What relation is there between the seminary's

School for Graduate Studies and its basic function of producing future clergy? I am, of course, raising again the basic distinction between the theoretical and the practical in theological education, a distinction which the fathers of the Missouri Synod presumed they had settled with the creation of two seminaries, one theoretical and the other practical. Actually, I think other factors distinguished the two seminaries over the years, and I thank God that most of those distinctions have been overcome.

My point is that the whole question of self-understanding has to be answered from the perspective of the seminary's primary objective. What we are should be determined by the church's mission of sharing God's life with the world. There is room here for stress on both the theoretical and the practical, on the seminary as a professional school and as a school of theology. Both these emphases have to serve the seminary's primary objective. That doesn't necessarily mean lowering standards or loosening up on requirements. But it may mean providing different tracks in place of the present one track leading to service in the church in order to provide the church with a variety of forms of ministry by which to achieve its mission. The church needs different forms and styles of ministry. Its mission is worldwide. It reaches out to urban centers, suburban communities, and rural areas. It has a ministry to the poor and poorly educated as well as to the prosperous and college graduates. The seminary should see itself as the instrument which helps fill the church's varied needs for ministry. The church's needs in mission should determine how we see ourselves as an educational institution.

I am really already talking about curriculum. The seminary's primary objective ought to determine the shape of the curriculum, too. Seminaries everywhere are in the process of making major curricular changes—changes in both content and methodology. Some entail radical departures from traditional seminary curricula. Concordia Seminary, too, is involved in a curriculum revision project. In this address I do not plan to do the work of the curriculum revision committee for them. But I suggest that we need to put the question of the shape of the curriculum within the context of our primary objective.

That perspective will enable us to see what there is of value in our present curriculum that should be retained and what changes we need to make in order to be better able to bring the blessings of new life to people everywhere in the world. Certainly the revised curriculum needs to provide plenty of opportunity for contact with our present world and with the needs and problems of its people in our time. But it also must provide the way for us to become acquainted with God's resources for human need and for the development of the skills needed to bring the blessings of new life to men. To fulfill our primary objective we need to strike a proper balance in our curriculum between reflection and action. Since our task is to prepare men for mission, we need to couple class work with practical experience in mission. As we helped lead the way in the development of field work and vicarage programs, we should be pioneering as the whole concept of field work for future ministry changes. Our primary objective also ought to shape our understanding of who we are

as faculty and students. We need to see our identity—all of us related to this institution—from the perspective of our ultimate purpose. Since we are all part of the church, we share in its responsibility of bringing the life of God to men. That is already our Christian responsibility totally apart from our professional vocation. Just because we are Christians, faculty and students ought to be in mission to the world. From such a perspective we can recognize our proper identity here at this place. We are united here by a common task that is designed to help the church achieve its mission. We are all servants—servants of God, servants of the church, servants of the people of the world to whom we bring the renewing power of God's life. That perspective ought to shape the way in which those of us on the faculty approach our teaching responsibilities. If we are really to do a job that promotes the ultimate objective of this institution, then no member of the faculty can afford to lose firsthand contact with the world and with the church out there in the world. Perhaps we need to find more effective ways of making it possible for faculty members to be renewed for their work at this place by periodic, practical service in mission. Students, too, need to see their identity in relation to the church's mission. They especially need to recognize that they are already now in mission and not just preparing for it.

The seminary's primary objective also ought to determine the shape of the seminary's relation to the church. The New Testament won't let us think of the church in denominational terms. When we talk about the seminary serving the church, we have to think of the church in less limited

terms than that of a single church body. Yet the seminary is an institution of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. In the vast majority of cases its graduates become ordained clergymen in that church body, though a changing fellowship situation could widen the possibilities of service in the future. In fact, the Missouri Synod is the primary focus of the seminary's service to the church. That service involves more than providing the Synod with ministerial candidates. For the purpose behind the function is to help the church achieve its mission in the world. The seminary hasn't achieved its objective each time it produces a graduating class. For one thing, we know that a seminary graduate is far from a finished product. He needs to be involved in a lifelong process of continuing education if he is going to be effective in helping the church achieve its mission. The seminary has to stick with him through his life to assist him in his ongoing education and to provide him with the opportunities for continued professional growth.

For another thing, the seminary's primary objective gives it a responsibility to help the church-at-large know what its mission is. The seminary has to help equip the church theologically for the ongoing task of applying the church's unchanging Gospel to the changing circumstances in the world. At times that requires speaking a new and different language and using unfamiliar forms and methods. Advocating change can get you into trouble with proponents of the status quo. There is a risk involved in reaching out to the uncommitted and unconverted. In our Lord's parable the shepherd who left ninety-nine sheep to search for the one lost sheep took

a rather considerable risk. In the story of the prodigal son our Lord reminds us that the faithful in the church are not always delighted with attention shown to the wayward and the lost. We have got to take the risk. And the seminary has to risk the church's disfavor if it is really going to be of help to the church in its efforts to achieve its mission of bringing God's life to the world.

The seminary isn't alone in the work of helping the church carry out its mission. Other agencies and institutions are involved. So are other seminaries. We need to join hands wherever possible in the task of helping the church achieve its mission to the world. I should think that the theological schools in the St. Louis area would find it possible to build on the excellent cooperative efforts already in progress, because we do have a common task. It is my hope that the Lutheran seminaries of America can become much more closely associated in what is really their common task.

I fully recognize that in focusing on mission as the primary objective that should determine the seminary's future shape, I have really said nothing new. In many ways that is already standard operation procedure here at this place. I know that. My intention in this address was to speak not so much *to* those who are associated together in the work of this school as *for* them. The point is perfectly summarized in the theme chosen for Inauguration Day and for the week of festivities that conclude the observance of the 130th anniversary of the founding of this institution. The theme appears in bold letters on the program for this day: "Seminary — In God for the World." That's what we are up to in this place. Brethren, the times are not exactly propitious for our work. I'm sure I don't have to spell out the many difficulties and problems in our way. But our cause is the Lord's and the church is His, too. I propose that we renew our efforts and confidently go about our work.

St. Louis, Mo.