

13. Professional and Higher Education

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Professional or Higher Education, as it pertains specifically to the training of those who will be pastors and teachers in our church bodies, is a subject under much discussion and disagreement among the membership of Lutheran churches in our country and elsewhere. For our purposes, we would confine ourselves to the system of Higher Education employed by The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in its pastor and teacher training program. This eliminates from consideration all tax-supported institutions of learning, commonly known as public schools of higher learning, as well as, church related colleges, which have as their purpose and goal, education for primary purposes other than training for the professional ministry of the church, although this may be a by-product of their operation.

The church owned colleges and seminaries of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod as any other Lutheran college, should be recognized as a "schools of the prophets", as primarily interested in supplying full-time workers for the church as the church needs them in its God-given purpose of preaching Law and Gospel in all the world. To accomplish this purpose, certain conditions and directives must be kept in mind:

I. Scripture has much to say about passing on to other generations the pure Word of God. Especially replete with such instructions are St. Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus. Among these we indicate for study such passages as 1 Timothy 1:3,4 4:1,2; also 2 Timothy 1:13,14; 2:2; 2:14,15; 2:23; 3:14; 4:2; 4:3,4. From Titus 1:9; 2:1; 3:9. There are, of course, many other passages pertinent to the subject.

II. Luther also has much to say about the kind of person who ought to appear in the pulpit and classroom. In his Table of Duties he lists many of the qualities which a person ought to possess in order to be a "bishop", beginning with his personal life and describing also the professional qualities of such a person, when he begins by saying, "a bishop must be blameless," and concludes that such a "bishop" must "hold fast the faithful Word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the gainsayers".

To Luther and to us it is very important and God-pleasing that a very Christ-centered and Scripturally oriented ministry be trained to lead God's people into God's Word, so that the Holy Spirit "might make them wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Our preparatory and terminal schools have had and will continue to have as their primary obligation, the development, under God, of a doctrinally sound ministry.

III. Dr. C. F. W. Walther, when confronted by the matter of ministerial training at the first delegate convention of the Missouri Synod, had something to say in Ft. Wayne, Indiana in 1874 as he issued a warning from the history of the church in Europe. Translated, his remarks were these: "Instead of earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the saints, as Luther did, leaders of the church have made intellectualism and modernism their slogans. Instead of holding on to the precious inheritance of pure doctrine which was passed on to us by our fathers through bitter struggles and trials, some of the leaders, even while seemingly defending Christianity and Christian

doctrine as a whole, are tearing down individual doctrines by maintaining that certain doctrines are open for question and by casting doubt upon others. Even the precious doctrine of the divine inspiration and perfection of the Canonical Writings of the Old and New Testament is being questioned, yes, cast aside, and those who do this questioning and casting aside are not being reprimanded. Those who call themselves servants of the Word want to lead the apostles and prophets back to school. Instead of preaching to the present generation that which it so sorely needs, namely repentance and faith, the sting is taken out of the Law, and the Gospel is perverted and Christianity is presented in some general and indefinite statements. Instead of separating themselves from those who are opposed to God and His Word and closing ranks with those who are truly brethren of the faith, they practise religious unionism on every hand and even cast aspersions and look with disdain at those who want to hold on to that which is truly the heritage of the Reformation."

Evidently, Dr. Walther was issuing the warning to the following generations that we must concern ourselves with the preparation of our ministry at all times so that these workshops of the Holy Spirit may never deteriorate and that our ministry might at all times be founded and grounded in the Word of God.

IV. Pursuing this thought a little further, we quote from the letter of FAITH FORWARD FIRST CONCERNS within The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod: "We approve and applaud many of the curricular changes and innovations which have been introduced in the Synod's program of ministerial training in recent years. We believe it is good that the professional ministers of the Word are not simply assuming, as many did a generation ago, that the opinions and conclusions of men, even of the most prominent scholars, were always right, but are seeking to assure themselves of the correctness of the same through earnest questions and serious study. At the same time we are concerned that the plenary, verbal inspiration of the Scriptures continue to be forthrightly — publicly and privately — upheld by every member of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and that the authenticity of all Canonical Books of the Bible and particularly also the historicity of the first chapters of Genesis are accepted. We are also determined that every member of the Synod let the Bible speak as the final authority in every matter of doctrine and practise among us."

The letter goes on to state: "We have, however, come to the realistic conclusion that there are some pastors, some teachers, some faculty members at our colleges and seminaries, and some authors who either by deliberate intent or through unclear and indefinite statements, and sometimes by careless comments and innuendoes, perhaps even unintentionally are causing confusion among us regarding the inspiration, authenticity, and authority of Scripture. It is also our impression that some of these men are uncharitably belittling the writings of some of the past leaders and scholars of our Synod."

These men were properly concerned about the course of Higher Education among us and particularly for the future of their church.

V. What directives might an Evangelical Church give to those charged with Higher Education in our Church:

1. Since we recognize the inherent and essential power of the Word, this Word must be the center of all campus activity in all our schools of higher learning.
2. "Thus saith the Lord" must supersede whatever any learned scholars may have said or written.
3. The Word of God, inspired by the Holy Ghost, must be recognized as the utterance of God, not to be broken by attack upon its inspiration, authenticity, authority, truthfulness, and saving virtue.
4. Those charged with instructing must in all humility let the Word sit in judgement upon all their teaching everywhere.

5. The President of an evangelical Lutheran body must be encouraged to maintain the purity of doctrine in our church.

6. The President must be invited to consult with those in authority in our schools of higher education in order that he might in person convince himself that the purposes and goals of the Synod are achieved.

7. Urge the President in all honesty to inform the members of the Synod concerning real problems in doctrine and practice if they exist.

8. Urge the President to use the proper authority and obligation thrust upon him by the Constitution of the Synod. LCMS Handbook, Art. XI B 1.2.3.4.

9. Urge all who teach future ministers and teachers to remember that the church is not their servant, but that they are servants of the church, as well as, servants of their Lord.

In conclusion we state: Our Synodical Institutions of Higher Education are to be utilized as God's instruments for the advancement of His Kingdom and as the Church's proper vehicles to serve the church faithfully for defining and teaching and declaring God's truth. Men who accept the Church's call to equip and strengthen others for ministry are compelled by common decency, honesty, integrity, and simple duty to abide by the public doctrine of the church in their classroom teaching and in formal public oral or printed statements. This does not preclude, of course, inquiry and research, nor does it abolish the right of the presentation of differing tentative or final conclusions to colleagues who are competent to evaluate such conclusions, findings, propositions, or theories and to explore their implications, but it is surely necessary that such new ideas be tested and approved by the church before they are introduced into the teaching content of material presented by official synodical institutions.

So shall the Church, under God, preserve for itself a God-fearing, Holy Ministry.