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A Critique of the Fourfold Pattern¹

David P. Scaer

A common life experience is that, as we encounter new things, we have the feeling of having already been there. Reading through the assigned chapter from *Theologia* was déjà vu. Somehow most of us have been there before. For me it is a journey taken several times, a path called by different names. Thus we have discussed whether the seminary was a graduate school or a professional school, never entertaining the option that it might not fit either category. Of course a seminary in the apostolic sense is defined in its relation not to academia but to the church. Not a church as organization with an administration, however, but a church, which in celebrating the eucharist demonstrates to itself and to the world that it is the body of Christ. Even the discussion in substituting the Master of Divinity nomenclature for the Bachelor of Divinity presumed that a seminary education was comparable to a secular graduate

¹From time to time educational institutions are required to undertake curricular review to insure that they are meeting the purposes for which they were established. In preparation for this process at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, which is essential to maintaining accreditation, several faculty members led discussion in September 1999 on six of the eight chapters of *Theologia* by Edward Farley (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983, 1989). Farley traces the development and reasons for dividing seminary studies into biblical, historical, systematic, and practical departments. Its subtitle, *The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*, already suggests that division is inherently problematic and should be reviewed. Recognized as revolutionary in its critique at the time of its publication nearly twenty years ago, its call for a more holistic study of theology may have been largely unheard. This essay on chapter 6, "A Critique of the Fourfold Pattern," is based on the writer's own experiences with curricular changes at the seminary. Numbers in parentheses are pages in *Theologia*, should the reader want to pursue the topic in depth. This essay is offered as part of the dialogue on how theology should be done.

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school and hence deserved the appropriate academic degree.² One should not be surprised if eventually all fully qualified seminary graduates receive doctorates. It will be argued that seminary graduates should be given a title comparable to optometrists. A seminary program is certainly just as demanding as optometry, if not more so.

In each chapter of *Theologia* Farley presents the same theme from different angles—that the fourfold schema of biblical, historical, systematic, and practical theology should be reevaluated. Rather than reiterating this part of his discussion, I will present my own reactions based upon my tenure at this institution.³

Instead of calling this chapter “A Critique of the Fourfold Pattern,” it might have been called “Humpty-Dumpty After the Fall.” I look forward with anticipation to that gifted colleague who will follow me and collect the broken egg shells and miraculously reassemble them into a whole egg, preferably hard-boiled, so that the internal contents are more resistant to future scrambling. My task is not reassembling broken bread crumbs into a new loaf, but further grinding the crumbs back into the original flour and water. Apparently in some seminaries the only thing holding the fractured shells together is the nostalgia of the annual academic catalog and the four departments, each with its own warlords defending their boundaries. Not only has theology been divided into a pie of four pieces, but it has been splintered into “clusters of specialities” (139-141), each with its own set of literature (144).

Two items must reevaluated. First, why are there four departments? Secondly, are we aware that in many cases secular

²Some time shortly after John Tietjen became president in 1969, Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis sent out Master of Divinity certificates to all graduates who had the B. D. Coming shortly before Christmas, each arrived with a souvenir calendar with a picture of the recently constructed Luther Tower. The seminary at Fort Wayne soon followed suit in adjusting the curriculum for students already on the campus and requiring two additional courses for its alumni with the B.D.

³The author joined the seminary in Springfield in September 1966.

non-churchly disciplines are determining how theology is being done? We are paying the fiddler and someone else is calling the tune, and that someone else doesn't really care about and is not listening to our melodies.

My assignment on this September 1999 morning was anticipated by a May 1997 conversation with the Anglican bishop of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. After I had extracted from his episcopally consecrated Grace that he had been a Seminec graduate and hence had LCMS roots, I answered his query about my present duties as a teacher of systematic theology and New Testament (more precisely the Holy Gospels, particularly Matthew, of which it can be said that it was the most important book ever written). His curt and annoyed reply was to question how one person could teach two disciplines—an educational philosophy that has from time to time found footing in our midst and that I knew in an all too real way. No one teaching systematics should be allowed to teach New Testament, at least not without a request from the department entrusted with that duty. In August 1999, under more pleasant circumstances, an ELCA clergyman, who said he was cringing at the thought that Anglican bishops would be ordaining Lutheran pastors even as he was receiving the sacrament from Anglican hands, also wondered how one person could remain current in the literature of such two diverse fields as systematics and New Testament. He reflected the current academic philosophy that disciplines are marked off and governed by contemporary scholarly literature (139). Both conversations may be considered direct lineal prophecies of the chapter assigned by Mr. Weinrich and awaiting me. Even before reading the book, I knew what it was about, because I had lived it.

Farley's appraisal of each department guarding its own turf is really how seminary faculties look upon themselves regardless of whether they are liberal, Neo-Evangelical, or, in our case, confessional. Dividing, subdividing, and dividing that which is already subdivided is, however, not only the bane of theological study. The old joke is that after a young man had graduated from medical school, he did an internship in ear, nose, and throat. After he had completed his specialization, he

told his financially overburdened father that he intended to specialize further and concentrate on the nose. At this his father asked him which nostril would be his chief concern. With all the benefits of specialization in medicine, the specialist becomes virtually incapable of recognizing diseases in fields other than his own. We may have already come to this juncture in the study of theology where the theologian finds himself incapable of teaching others to preach and the preacher brags about his inability to do theology, especially in his preaching. He is practical, so he claims. Or, tragically, he finds himself intimidated by those who claim a theological expertise for themselves.

Fractured curricular thinking has been prevalent in our circles for some time as is evident by the accepted LCMS platitude that in today's terms Luther would have been an exegete. Such an assessment is not only cliché, but shallow, because it reads back into the sixteenth century a frame of reference that did not crystalize until two centuries later. In modern terminology Luther embraced all disciplines. He was as much a systematician (as evidenced by the doctrinal essays including three of the Lutheran Confessions) as he was an historian (as demonstrated by his extraordinary command of the ancient sources) as he was a practical theologian (who served for several years *de facto* pastor of Saint Mary's) as he was an exegete. He was as much the theologian in the pulpit and caring for sick and dying as he was in the lecture hall. The same assessment could be made for Melancthon, who, even without ordination, saw biblical studies in the service of preaching and, though a classicist, also wrote three of our confessions, most notably the Augsburg Confession. Trained in linguistics, he wrote the *Loci*, which is recognized as the first Lutheran dogmatics. To say that one clergyman is a practical theologian or a parish pastor and another is theologian is not only a disservice to our Lutheran heritage, but is exemplary of the disintegration of theology into autonomous and, in some cases, incompatible parts. Claiming a speciality uncovers a hidden arrogance on the one making such assertions for himself.

Farley calls particular attention to homiletics. Sermons begin with the original situation of the biblical text and proceed to the contemporary situation without "any theological appraisal" (144). Such preaching displaces church tradition, which in our case is the confessions and dogmatics. A sermon is so concerned with the listeners' needs – as if the pastor could really know this or be able to identify them even in a congregation of fifty people – that the sermon is anything but theological. In some cases we might discover that homiletics is treated as an autonomous discipline with its own rules of rhetoric and delivery. Saint Louis alumni might remember that in the 1950s sermon delivery was taught by a speech teacher who, without ordination, had never stood before a congregation or an altar. It was as much a course in calisthenics as pulpit gesturing. A speech in the Roman forum was in form no different than a sermon delivered by Peter in Jerusalem or Paul in Athens.

Homiletics attempts to find its closest link in the theological curriculum to biblical studies, but often the task proceeds without the input of historical theology and the unifying aspect of systematic theology (144). Perhaps in our case a student begins to learn how to preach without a fully formed sacramental theology and so his sermon can predictably fit a general Protestant genre. He could preach the sermon in a Presbyterian or Baptist church whose congregations would find it a familiar fare. A fundamentalism that claims an immediate access to the Holy Spirit through the text apart from the history of the church is raw biblicism and a spiritually arrogant denial of the creed's affirmation in "one holy catholic and apostolic church." Equally tragic, it does not do justice to the unity of Christian doctrine. The fragmented results of liberal exegetical thought in the nineteenth century were a negative cause in the rise to Neo-Orthodoxy in the twentieth century. It offered a relief to the fragmented biblical results by providing that unified theology that the critical scholars were incapable of producing. Today narrative theology may also have been looked upon as an attempt to provide a unified theology in the wake of form criticism, which fragmented the Gospels into molecules and atoms.

Throughout Farley claims that function and goals have long determined the courses that go into curriculum. No longer does the received tradition (confessions, dogmatics, history) determine the shape of the curriculum, but this is determined by asking what the church wants (127-128). Schleiermacher, you are still with us! Someone else will have to review how many times our seminary's curricula have been changed at the request of a synodical convention or board. Before reading Farley's analysis, many of us have known that our motor has been running rough and that some wires from the distributor cap have been attached to the wrong spark plugs. We have felt the disunity of the theological curriculum, but never really diagnosed underlying cause of the malady. For us, one practical but failed solution in a search for theological curricular unity has been team teaching, but this has more of the aroma of an administrator putting into practice principles learned in acquiring his degree. Team teaching did not come from the sense that theology is a holistic discipline and that it is not the sum total of its parts. Theology is built from the top down and not by assembling parts. For us, the theological totality is Christ whose perfect revelation and presence can be found for the believer first in baptism and at their zenith in the Lord's Supper. Unless we are willing to say this, any doctrine of the real presence is meaningless, a doctrine safely ensconced in dogmatics. Curriculum is a theological and not really an educational task. Education degrees may produce administrators, but they do not guarantee the quality of teaching or provide the unifying structure that the teaching of theology requires if it is to be a churchly discipline.

Farley's biting analysis in its extreme form fits all of the mainline and university-related seminaries and schools of theology, institutions that are intent on demonstrating their academic credentials. This attitude has attracted theologians at least since the Age of the Enlightenment. Thus in our time Bultmann's exegetical method was Heidigger's existentialism clothed in Lutheran terminology, especially the law and the gospel. Moltmann updated Hegel, and, by seeing a progress in history, was a philosophically distant cousin of Lenin. Tillich

was up front in using philosophy to clarify and vindicate the themes of faith (137). Contemporary systematic theology in nearly every case is a philosophy wrapped in biblical and traditional theological terms, a problem for novice students who believe that every word should have only one meaning. On the surface, Barth may seem to be saying nothing more than what was said by Reformation and post-Reformation theologians, but he was not. Any catalog of a major mainline denominational seminary will prove this point.

A review of the last forty years of our own seminary's curricula will indicate that, even though our theology has remained at the core of our seminary studies, we have not remained immune from the same knee-jerk approach to curriculum change that responds to contemporary currents in society and the world. A survey of curricular adjustment shows that functionalism or external factors, that is, what the church needs or wants, has been determinative in our adding and subtracting courses from the curriculum, never asking how this related to the Christological core of Lutheran theology. Current fads in the secular world determined adjustments to the curriculum. Feministic studies have found a central place in mainline denominational seminaries, play a major role in the meetings of the American Academy of Religion, and have invaded the Society of Biblical Literature. Our seminaries are among the few religious educational institutions where they have not been added to the constitutive core of studies. Of course, this involvement of secular courses in theological studies was proposed by Tillich and articulated by John Tietjen in saying that the world sets the agenda.⁴

In our own midst we are not asked to listen to what the world wants, but to what the congregations and the people want. When it comes to the teaching of the liturgics, the standard urged is what the congregations are doing or would like to do, even if their ideal services are indistinguishable from the Assemblies of God. The call comes that we are to listen to the

⁴John Tietjen, "The Gospel and the Theological Task," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 40 (June, July-August): 434-443.

people. No change in the curriculum has taken place, but a full court press has been set up on the seminaries. A few real life examples from our history prove the point. A course on ethics was added as a response to the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. It did not evolve out of the basic premise of Christianity that loving one's neighbor was second only to loving God. Love of the neighbor is not an ethical principle suspended in a theological vacuum, but it is only the practice of sanctification, which in turn is the other side of the coin of justification. Justification in turn is the reality of Christology in the life of the believer. In turn, Christology is the perfect manifestation of God whose trinitarian existence is what love is all about. Not incidental to ethics is that the Father loves the Son and in response the Son loves the Father. The God who loves the Son and in the Son loves us invites us to respond to Him and to one another in love. In placing a course in ethics in the curriculum, such an Augustinian concept of God (which is also a biblical one) never entered the discussion. How ethics was viewed can be seen in that the first instructor assigned to teach that course was a specialist in Afro-American studies, called Black Studies then, and now pursues that discipline at Syracuse University. The content and shape of ethics were determined by the external environment. A later bifurcation led to two supposedly distinct courses, one on social ethics and another on theological ethics—an amazing distinction because in a seminary curriculum ethics must be theological and ethics by definition has to do with proper behavior in society. There is a kind of irony in the entire procedure, inasmuch as we were adopting a program of separating ethics from theology, which was a hallmark of both the Enlightenment and Schleiermacher, against whose theologies our seminary and its Synod were founded.

Let us pursue this helter-skelter approach to curriculum, since the inclusion of ethics is only one item. Several alleged cases of pastoral mismanagement brought a course on parish administration into the curriculum. One can assume that some successful business persons were annoyed by the lack of their pastor's organization and wrote some letters or formally

petitioned the Synod. After all, more and more church members saw the church as an organization that should be operated by sound business principles. And why not? One district lists as one of its officers a “vice-president for marketing.” Counseling as a profession—that is getting paid for doing it—was popularized in the wake of Sigmund Freud and soon found its way into the seminary curriculum. Already in 1950s psychology was required at one seminary and had become a norm in evaluating a student’s fitness for ministry. Like atoms doomed to splitting, another bifurcation took place. Crisis counseling was spun off like a subsidiary corporation. One of a minister’s obligations became helping people to live happy or holistic lives, content with themselves and their families. All this was done without paying attention to the words of Jesus that one’s enemies would be members of his own household.

After the statistical growth spurts in the late 1940s and 1950s which led to large church and membership increases, the Synod found itself afloat without the sweet trade winds of the Holy Spirit. (During the LCMS heyday, two congregations were opened every month and it seemed as if one-half the seminary graduates started a mission congregation.) When the statistical doldrums emerged in the 1970s, solutions were found by adding courses in evangelism and missions. Of course the evidence may prove that the proliferation of these courses corresponded to a statistical stagnation or decline. We have never examined the principles of witnessing in evangelization and mission work to see if they may have been taken over from the Baptists (who are often still revered as the evangelists and missionaries par excellence). Every pastor should be a Billy Graham—and some copied his style and others may have preached his sermons.

I do not know what crisis generated a course in parish education. Based on past additions, some pastor was thought to be a poor teacher and again external forces were directed to the seminary. Having this course taught at a seminary by a parochial school teacher assumed two things. One, that a pastor in teaching confirmands was essentially doing what the professional teacher was doing five days a week, which of

course, is not so. In making a commitment to the parochial school, the parents are legally required to have the children there. With a confirmation class the pastor must depend on the willingness of the children and really on the commitment of the parents, who may find soccer or ballet or violin practice more advantageous to their children's future. Secondly, in my memory, the philosophical assumptions inherent in the principles of education used by the professional educators were never analyzed. Education and its principles remain sacred cows, objective truths that stood above and outside of scrutiny. Proportionately decreasing incoming receipts to the LCMS headquarters almost led to a required course in stewardship. In the end the seminary was required to show that sound principles of stewardship could be found in the established curriculum. In all these cases—and there might be more—external factors determined what students were to learn.

In comparison with the curricula of mainline denominational seminaries, ours possesses an integrity. We, however, are not above reproach. The unity of theology has not determined our goals. External goals have been imposed on the curriculum. Past additions to our curriculum may be compared to decorating a Christmas tree with lights and ornaments placed to enhance the appearance of the tree, but that never become essential parts of the tree. In Farley's model the tree in some seminaries—perhaps most seminaries—has been replaced by a pole decorated with ornaments. In our situation too many ornaments may eventually weigh the tree down. The student is taught how to do it, but he knows less and less what "it" is. Function replaces essence.

Just how have we gotten to this situation where the auxiliary disciplines are considered more and more vital for the preparing of a pastor? Farley names Pietism and the Enlightenment as culprits, an assessment that may apply to our situation. Historically Pietism saw theology as a matter of the head and extrinsic to the true religion of the heart, which expresses itself best not in a regular practice of the eucharist but in personal devotions and the private gatherings of Christians. Public worship, especially the eucharist, took on the characteristic of an adiaphoron, at least in comparison to faith. The

eighteenth-century Enlightenment amputated theology from the church and placed it in the university or the academy, as this sphere is some times called. As long as the seminary is seen only or even chiefly as an academic institution in this Enlightenment sense, then daily chapel services, for example, Matins and Vespers, and a weekly eucharistic worship, are not and cannot be integrated into the seminary life. Pietism detaches theology from faith and Enlightenment Rationalism isolates theology from the church by giving its responsibility to the academic world. Michael Horton, a leading conservative Reformed theologian, contends that a seminary does not have to or perhaps should not have a chapel because it is not church. In the Pietistic schema, theology, especially dogmatics, becomes an activity of the head and not of the heart. Theology informs neither faith nor the preaching to create faith and ultimately becomes peripheral to church life. Pietism's ripest fruits are ecumenical alliances where faith as an activity of the heart replaces theology as the core. In practice the Bible is seen as accessible to the uneducated as it is to those trained in the biblical disciplines.

Basic to the Enlightenment ideal is that the knowledge from and about God was essentially no different than other kinds of knowledge, all of which under the proper circumstances were equally accessible to the mind. In this arrangement, in which all forms of knowledge have an equal claim on the truth, theology or religion is pushed to the peripheral as a cultural phenomenon. So in some schools of the Concordia University System — as it is reported — the teaching of religion is assumed into other departments like the social studies, as if it were another kind of humanities course. In the new academic galaxy, theology comes to occupy the inferior position, a moon rotating around a planet, neither of which produces its own light. As a luminary in the scholarly heavens, its light is borrowed and reflected from the respectable sciences. It must be examined to see how this process was foundational in the curriculum of the Concordia Senior College (1957-1977) and taken over into the present university system.

Farley addresses seminary and not college curricula, but in our system the forerunners of our current colleges were founded as pre-theological institutions with "pre" serving only as a prefix to the important substance of "theology." In reviewing the curriculum, we have to look at the legitimacy of "the fourfold pattern" of having separate, perhaps at times autonomous, departments of biblical, historical, systematic, and practical theology. This is what Farley's book is all about. Eventually it may be more significant to be aware that secular disciplines, or as Farley calls them, the auxiliary disciplines, will completely control our theological agenda. Consider Farley's judgment:

the auxiliary disciplines . . . provide the scholarly apparatus for the theological disciplines and which give them the character of "sciences." Thus, we have linguistics, archaeology, history, ancient chronology, hermeneutics, rhetoric, sociology, psychology, and various philosophies. The satellite disciples likewise contributed to the definition of each theological area, the result being that each area, while retaining its justification as part of theological study from the clerical paradigm, is defined by a designated subject matter, frequently a la literature, correlate with methods drawn from auxiliary, secular disciplines (128-129).

A closer examination of the record may find that my memory has a meager evidence for an all too mild critique.