



THE SPRINGFIELDER

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The Springfield Image

RICHARD J. SCHULTZ

President, Concordia Theological Seminary (1970-)
Professor (1965-)

As we celebrate the 125th Anniversary of Concordia Theological Seminary in Springfield, Illinois we will be reviewing much history. History, in one sense, is an accurate record of "what happened." However, history includes also the varying interpretations of "what happened." As a minor contribution to the remembrance of years past, and from the vantage point of the president's office, I should like to comment about the reputation or image of the Springfield seminary. The changing image of the institution is a significant factor in its history. There may be a notable service connected to this little offering if some ghosts of the past can properly be laid to rest.

There is, in the first place, the image of *inferiority* to deal with. Euphemistically, the Springfield seminary was called "the practical seminary." Whole generations of clergy of the synod who were educated elsewhere know that "practical" meant "inferior." Strangely, this judgment did not relate to the condition of the campus. Rollicking tales of old grads about buildings with picturesque pseudonyms as "Castle Gardens," "the Sheep Stable" and "the Kaffee-muehle" reveal that this campus was not an architectural gem. Like the Chinese term question, the closing of Springfield was a perennial argument in synod. The "inferior" image of Springfield did not reflect estimates of the physical property; most people weren't sure just which of the many Springfields in the U.S.A. contained "the other" seminary.

The inferiority image resulted from an estimate of the required curriculum and, by inference, of the student product of the seminary. Judged by academic standards which placed a high premium on a knowledge of the classical languages (and a years-long struggle with *The Gallic Wars*, *The Anabasis*, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, Plato's *Dialogues*, *De Civitatis Dei*) and on a mental discipline theory of learning, the Springfield curriculum *was* inferior. The continuation of the school indicated an uneasiness about blocking the road into the ministry for men of superior piety who (primarily because of age) were not considered capable of the standard academic hurdles. Springfield graduates bore the image throughout their lives. The stigma was generally applied gently and back-handedly by the withholding of any great expectations from Springfield grads. Traces of this are evident right here on campus when we bolster our own ego by noting with glee the election of a Springfield graduate to a district presidency.

Has the inferiority image been exorcised? Two elements have conspired to change it. First, ideas of what constitutes a good theological education have changed. Not merely practical skills, but

also the development of the individual in the pastoral role have come to the fore. Knowledge of the Bible and interpretive skills remain at the core. Nevertheless, ministry today is seen less as a by-product of the academic study of theology and more as a discipline in its own right. Second, the actual curriculum at Springfield has changed so that it is a challenge to college graduates with a bachelor's degree. About 90 per cent of the Springfield students graduate from college *before* entering the seminary. The changing nature of theological education and Springfield's changing curriculum have converged to eradicate justification for the inferiority image. Moreover, the Lord of the Church has granted effective and powerful ministries to many Springfield graduates. Not the least of the factors which have contributed to our ability to serve with distinction is a faculty of dedicated and highly trained teachers.

The other facet of Springfield's image is more difficult to define. The term most frequently used is "conservative." People have referred to "Springfield mentality" and "Springfield theology." Some call us conservative and add a prayer that we will remain that way. Others who use the term are at least suspicious that we are somehow blocking the progress of the church by conservatism. They pray that we will loosen up a bit. In dealing with this part of our image we are thrown into a semantic maelstrom. What is meant by "conservative"?

If conservative means reactionary, anti-intellectual, legalistic, fundamentalistic, Biblicistic or any other of many possible adjectives which all basically means "bad," we reject the image. If others impose it—for whatever reason—we are not able to protect our institution against the image. If *individuals* connected with our institution deserve the approbrium of these terms, we undoubtedly must share the blame to some extent. A school does not bear total responsibility for its products, but it must be significantly responsible.

If, on the other hand, "conservative" means a firm acceptance of the canonical Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions as a correct and binding exposition of the faith of the Scriptures, we accept the image. It *is* conservative to believe in and proclaim what God teaches as truth in the Scriptures. Our faculty and graduates *must* meet the test of confessing that salvation has been provided alone through the shed blood of God's Son, the miracles are metaphysical realities, that Jesus is both true God and true man, that His body and blood are really present in the sacrament, that baptism has saving power, that creation was a deliberate act of an omnipotent God—and the whole range of Scriptural doctrine. There is not space in this article to review our total doctrinal stance. But it *is* conservative. Doctrine is precious to us. So, likewise, is evangelical practice. We are concerned to retain God's revealed truths in their purity and to reject denials of revealed truth. We are equally concerned to share God's saving truth with all men by the most effective means at our dis-

posal. The most astute scholarship and the most inventive techniques of communication are welcome on this campus. We reject a literalistic approach to Scripture even as we confess that we are bound forever by the doctrines of Scripture. We covet the image of a superior educational institutional institution which is unflinchingly conservative in the best traditions of evangelical Lutheranism.

Having struggled to define the conservative nature of our seminary, I sense that my definition is not very helpful. It will be "decoded" in different ways by various readers. Some will read it as a tiresome recital of the obvious. Some will see in it some sort of subtle evasion. Others may sense it as a self-righteous judgment of others. To all whom we invite to celebrate God's abundant blessings with us we must finally say, "Come to know and understand our *total* ministry and form a mature image of Springfield."