

REPORT ON THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF THE EVANGELICAL AND REFORMED CHURCH

Lancaster, Pennsylvania

by Daniel Williams

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Note: This report is a discussion of some aspects of the work of this seminary. It is made after a brief visit to the seminary by Daniel Williams. It is in no sense an official report of the Survey of Theological Education in the United States and Canada. It is prepared at the suggestion of Dean Dunn and is a personal series of comments on certain aspects of the school's operation. The report is made for the discussion of interested people in the school, but not for publication.

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This school has a very important history and tradition of its work in theological education. One who visits the school quickly discovers that the basic ideals of training for the ministry which are accepted are rooted in a history of a high conception of the ministry and the special contribution of the distinguished leaders of this denomination, including the Mercersburg theologians, to theological education. The tradition of the school, rather of the Evangelical and Reformed Denomination, calls for a trained ministry and is opposed to the exercise by theological students of pastoral offices until they have completed their work. This circumstance puts the school in a favorable position to have the students concentrate on getting a good foundational training before they assume responsibilities of the pastorate. Further through its affiliation with Franklin and Marshall College the school is in a situation in which there are certain resources available for the giving of an enlarged theological training.

Although the circumstances so far stated put this school in a position to do a more thorough piece of work in the theological education than many schools have done, one has the impression that the full potentialities of this school even with no increase in its present resources are not being realized. In large part the reasons for this are the same reasons which bear on a great many American denominational seminaries. They are not peculiar to this school, and the solutions to them not only are difficult but do not seem to be in sight for many schools. There are in addition a few aspects of the work of this particular school which to an outside visitor at least seem to call for some internal adjustment which ought not to be too difficult.

The school has a vigorous administration, an able faculty and the work which is being done appears to be of good quality. The following comments then do not attempt in detail to underline good work being done, but will be most helpful if they concentrate on raising some questions and points where discussion and revision may be desirable.

The school is governed in an unusual way with two separate boards having quite distinct functions in the oversight and control of the school. On the one hand, the corporation has control of finances, buildings, and apparently of contractual arrangements with faculty members. The Board of Visitors which consists wholly of ministerial members controls the academic and internal affairs of the school. These two groups join in a certain equal arrangement in the election of faculty of the seminary. It seems to the undersigned observer that this arrangement can lead to some difficulties. From the point of view of a faculty member it is important to have all the terms of employment, the situation of the teacher, his needs, responsibilities considered by some one body which is responsible for the whole operation of the school. For example, the matters of needs of instruction, of the arrangement of departments and the needs in various fields cannot be separated from the resources at hand and de-

cisions which the board which controls the finances makes. One must raise the question as to whether it would not be desirable to have some greater liaison between these two groups so that all the problems which affect the fundamental policy of the school may be considered from every point of view. It would be important to have agreed upon and stated policy with respect to the matter of faculty appointments, the arrangements in connection with faculty appointments, a specific policy with respect to retirement age which is clearly understood and which the school sticks to. These are simple matters of good administrative procedure and while they can be taken care of with a somewhat complex arrangement, it would seem desirable to achieve some greater integration of those who are responsible for the over all life of the school. One may raise further the question as to a board of visitors which consists entirely of ministers. Since this board is responsible for educational policy would it not be desirable to have some laymen and especially to have some people from education who bring to matters of educational policy a point of view developed through a good deal of educational experience? On the other hand, would it not be desirable to have on the corporation which controls the finances of the school some representatives of the ministry rather than to have it exclusively a lay board? It may be observed that some opportunities for mutual education and reinforcement of clergy and laymen will not be realized under the present arrangement. Finally, it seems again to the undersigned somewhat doubtful to have two different administrative officers report to these two groups. Again, are not basic matters of policy of such character that they require the cooperative thinking of those concerned with education and those concerned with the finances and other resources?

One further point with respect to the government of the school. Apparently the Board of Visitors has power to require a course to be given in the curriculum. Normally it would seem to be good policy to have some provision for consultation and agreement by the faculty as well as by a governing board about any specific requirement in the curriculum.

It would appear further that the relationships of faculty and the governing boards in the matter of the appointment of new faculty members and administrators to the school have not been clarified. While no one can make general rules that necessarily apply to every school, the principle would seem to be a sound one that the faculty of a school ought to be consulted in a stated and regular manner either as a whole or through its designated representatives in the making of any appointment of significance to a school. Unless this is done appointments can be made without reference to general and agreed upon educational policy and the fundamental work of the faculty is determined simply by the making of individual appointments whether or not these fit in with the other potentialities and directions which the faculty is trying to realize. It is true that in a great many theological schools the power to make appointments is very often lodged in a board or administrator entirely apart from the faculty but in most cases there is either a stated or agreed upon procedure for faculty consideration.

With respect to the physical plant of the school, one can say that in general the plant seems fairly adequate. The school reports that there is a need for seminar rooms and faculty offices. This visitor would also have to say that he felt the office of the librarian is quite small and cramped and that it would appear to him for adequate cataloging room and general administrative efficiency some extension of the library facilities would seem to be in order. The school shares with a great many American seminaries a need for dormitory space and for apartments for married students.

The school is supported directly by the E. and R. Denomination. This support has been and it is being increased. Students are directly supported by the denomination, and there seems to be agreement that the denomination would not look favorably on the charging of tuition to students. There are a good many theological educators who would take the position that it is most unwise not to make some tuition charge of theological students, and this matter has been and probably will be further discussed in this school.

The school would appear to be in a very favorable situation with respect to its faculty. The ratio of students to faculty is very good, about one to ten. The present faculty consists of many vigorous and well trained men in the theological field. My observation would be that this faculty is much greater in potentiality than it is at present. What is needed is many years of working together, of vigorous discussion, and that the school ought to encourage in every way possible the cooperative spirit of the faculty and to encourage especially the continuance of discussions which have just begun in which the faculty is taking a general view of the problem of theological education and is working cooperatively at its problem.

It is not possible until the results of our study are completed to make any very adequate statements about the level of faculty salaries. The salary scale at this school would appear to be certainly not on the lowest group but on the other hand to be not any higher if at all than the average salary. One would wonder if faculty members do not find it necessary to do considerable outside preaching and teaching simply in order to supplement their income. In situations where this is the case, the question must be immediately raised as to whether the school is making its most efficient use of its faculty and providing for them the situation in which they can develop adequate creative scholarship. There is at present no provision for sabbatical leave though there appears to be some hope of this. With a faculty of men who are as promising as this group is it would appear to be too bad if financial and other pressures prevent these men from making their fullest contribution not only to the denomination but to the life and thought of the whole church.

The visitor had almost no opportunity to talk with students because of the shortness of time. A few remarks then may be made on the basis of conversations with the faculty members and the data supplied. As in most seminaries the students come in very large numbers from the region in which the seminary is located, and most of the B.D. students come from the denomination which supports the school. An exchange student relationship with Lincoln University seems to be an excellent extension of the community spirit of the school and should be encouraged.

The report of the school shows that 50% of the students enter this seminary with a college record at the C level. Members of the faculty point out that one must judge the college grade average in relation to the known standards of the particular colleges. It is probably true in this case that at least in certain instances the colleges from which these students come with a C average have quite high standards, and these might well be B-averages in another school. With this said, however, the fact remains that this is a rather low average of college performance of men entering the ministry, especially in this denomination with its high standards. It would appear to be in order that the school confer with the committees on the church and the ministry to see whether sufficient rigor is being exercised in screening students and also to raise the question which must be raised everywhere in the colleges today as to how abler students may be interested in entering seminary.

The curriculum of the school shows a full offering in all the major fields. The students can get into their course all the different required subjects and electives by taking 15 hours a week, and they are permitted to take as many as 17. While it is always hard to see how courses can be cut down one would have to say that the total requirement in preaching, religious education, pastoral work, church administration seems a little heavy in relation to the rest of the curriculum.

Generally speaking, 15 or 16 hours is too much for students at the graduate level to be spending in class work. It should further be pointed out that with the new year's requirement in Greek now introduced this reduces still further the opportunity of students for election within the various offerings within the school.

The matter of pre-theological studies should be mentioned because with its loca-

tion next to Franklin and Marshall College the seminary would appear to be in an especially favorable position to help its students to complete an adequate general education. The school reports, however, that not very much use is made of the college in supplementing and reinforcing the students' general cultural training and background. Part of the difficulty lies in the different schedule of the college, but the more serious difficulty is that which is encountered throughout American theological education, namely that theological students simply do not have time to add to their course college work in subjects which they have missed previously. The question must be raised sharply, however, not simply in relation to this seminary, but to all, whether our statement of standards for pre-theological studies means anything unless we enforce it. If students come to seminary without adequate general education they should not be allowed to finish until those deficiencies have been completed by some kind of reading, study or advanced college work. This undoubtedly means a lengthening of the time which students take to get their seminary training, but the issue is clear before the churches as to whether or not they want their ministry to have a solid grounding in the basic disciplines which contribute to a general education.

The field work supervision is carried out with a thoroughness in this school which one does not find in many schools. The possible suggestion here is that it might be well for the faculty members who make visits to the field to confer together at least a few times during the year about the problems which they find and to take counsel with one another about the implications of their experience of theological education.

The importance of clinical training and of the psychological disciplines in the work of the minister is being demonstrated in these days. The school has a well trained and able man in this field. At the same time his load of responsibility as well as of his own training does not make it possible for him to give some of the technical work in this area which might be given. Some further effort to encourage students and to help them to do clinical training in the summer time or in connection with their course would be a valuable supplementation to the good work now going on.

In connection with the library, the school carries a notation in the American Association of Theological Schools listing that there is inadequate support of the library. As noted before my observation was that the housing of the library and particularly work space for its supervisor and cataloguers are probably inadequate. The school points out, however, that the splendid library of the college just across the street is important in research in the history of the school and its denomination, and the library is accessible to all students. This is a point where the American Association may need to re-examine its own standards of judgment. There are several schools which feel that the total library resources available are adequate and it would be a mistake to duplicate collections.

The general community life and spirit of the school seems good. There are some difficulties as to the housing arrangements. Students who visit the campus only for the day cannot enter always fully into the community life, but the spirit seems good. The school appears to have if anything a somewhat lesser problem with psychological difficulties in its students than many schools have, the counseling services of the school seem to be good. The procedure of reporting a student's full record regularly to a synodical committee was somewhat unusual in my experience. I cannot help but question the wisdom of this in some cases. This always raises a problem for the counselor as to how much of the confidential material he may gain through counseling interviews is subject to being made available to other parties, but perhaps this situation is adequately controlled.

In conclusion one would concur that this seminary stands in the midst of the typical pressures in the American situation. All the circumstances of the pressure from churches for ministers, the pressure of time upon the curriculum, the financial needs of students and of the school are evident here. In the midst of these the

school is seeking to maintain and develop the quality of training which it has traditionally stood for. Its instruction in the traditional fields is good, and it has an able and imaginative man at work in the field of rural church. The curriculum on the whole, however, looks pretty closely confined to the traditional disciplines presented in a fairly rigid pattern without much opportunity for a critical relating of the Christian faith to the general issues in our culture as these arise in psychology, sociology, political science, economics, and other fields. This school would seem to be in a favorable position to see what can be done with the resources at hand and with the development of new resources to realize more fully the potential theological training which remains at present somewhat unrealized because of the rather rigid mold into which our present procedure seems to fit.

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