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THOUGHTS ON THE TEACHING OF THEOLOGY

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Just what is it that we are trying to do in our teaching of theology in the Seminary? Certainly we want to develop theological competence in our students so that they will devote themselves to a lifetime of disciplined theological study no matter what branch of the ministry they pursue. We desire that they should be true witnesses to the faith, and that they should seek always to know and speak the truth according to the best light of reason and faith. Our idea of the seminary corresponds with M. King Hubbert's description of the university, which "traditionally . . . is a community of scholars whose dual functions are (i) to inquire into the foundations and to extend the borders of knowledge, and (ii) to impart this knowledge and the mental attitudes of inquiry and scholarship to their students." We the scholars want our students to spend their lives seeking knowledge, and we want them to carry the attitudes of inquiry and scholarship into their ministry. It is our hope that our students will be diligent as well as creative in the preparation of their sermons and when they dare to proclaim God's word it will only be with intellectual as well

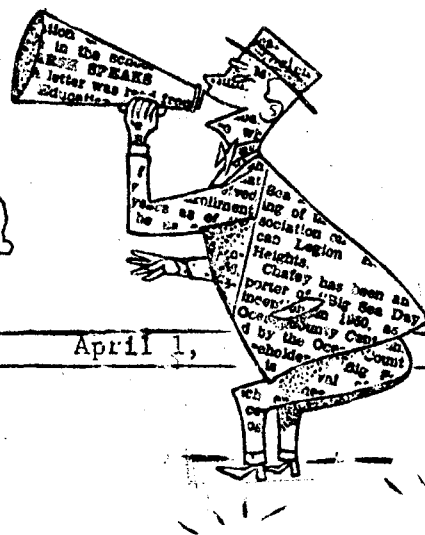
as spiritual integrity. (What a vain hope!)

We know that this legitimate desire that our seminary graduates who go into the parish should be scholarly ministers is not being fulfilled today. We know that . . . low standards . . . obtain within the professional ranks of the Church. We suspect that it is not entirely the fault of the laymen in our churches, but that somehow we have failed to prepare men to be the kind of pastor we hold before the student as ideal.

I propose to offer my suggestions concerning the criteria of a successful education in theology for a parish minister, and then to measure the teaching we are doing by these criteria.

To be a life-long theologian even in the midst of a parish ministry, a minister must:

- 1) Know the doctrines of the Christian faith and have reasons for holding his own theological views;
- 2) Be able to translate theology into the language of his generation and the thought-world of his parish;
- 3) Be able to grow and change his position as he studies more deeply in theology;
- 4) Be able to integrate his theology with other aspects of his experience, so that within himself there is a dialogue between theology and all the other configurations of his experience;



5) Respect authorities and schools and his own teachers, but never accept a position because of the one who holds it.

Now let me elaborate:

1) A minister, in order to be a preacher, pastor, and even administrator must know what the Church stands for. He must have a comprehension of theology as a whole, and not merely know the most recent theological views. The minister who holds to his own theology as if it were a life-preserver, simply because it is his and he believes it, is a sorry representative of the Church.

The minister with a dated theology exhibits the kind of truncated theological education that gave him a final position before he had any right to achieve it. His theological questions were answered almost before they were asked. His education was too contemporary because it did not give him a sense of history, despite the emphasis upon that concept, whereby he could see how and why certain doctrines have developed as they have, and why it is possible for one generation of theologians to formulate--and perhaps even to repudiate--the position of their teachers.

Insofar as a seminary graduates men of this type it has failed in its ministry to the Church. . .because it has not succeeded in creating in these men the attitudes of inquiry and scholarship that would make them dissatisfied with a position cut off from its historical antecedents.

2) Knowing Church doctrine is not enough, of course. The minister must be able to translate his faith into language other than that of the professional theologian.

We are producing a generation of men who cannot say what they mean by their theology. They can only repeat the words in the hope that somehow these words, if heard often enough, will communicate their meaning to the listeners.

This means to me that our courses in communication have failed to do what was intended. Perhaps they have become so concerned with technique that they have lost their original purpose. Let me

suggest a conclusion to which I have come, namely that this activity of translation or paraphrase is one that must be nurtured while the student is still in seminary: we must not expect him to develop the facility on his own after he has graduated.

3) A minister must also be able to grow and to change his position as he studies more deeply in theology. This should be taken for granted, but there is no evidence to support the view that ministers do in fact change their views as they grow more mature. Just the opposite is generally true.

The seminaries must be partly responsible for this in that we have failed to make scholars of our students. We have not managed to instill in them the kind of intellectual conscience that prohibits them from expressing second-hand opinions or views that have not been reconsidered and questioned time and again. Perhaps too often we provide only the lecture-audience situation, so that they never experience the excitement of personal discovery; for I believe that once one has known this thrill he is dissatisfied with less.

4) The minister must be able to integrate his theology with other aspects of his experience so that within himself there is a dialogue between theology and all the other configurations of his experience.

One might expect a minister whose theology is woven into the whole of his life to be more articulate than one whose is not. His preaching, calling, counseling, teaching and administration would be related to one another through the focus of theology. And this should make theology meaningful to the experience of the congregation, since the whole life of fellowship in Christ would take its meaning from its theological center.

I do not believe that we have succeeded in our seminaries, despite a whole generation of theological revival, in making more than the first hesitant step toward this type of integration in our own teaching and curriculum. The curriculum is not yet, for the most part, a theological curriculum, for it remains

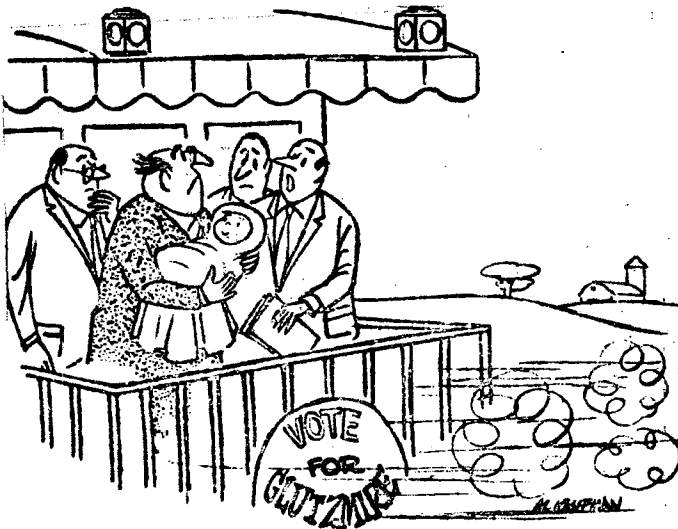
too much the creation of a congeries of pressure groups, trained under different presuppositions, and each concerned to maintain the integrity and/or status of its own position.

I am convinced that we cannot expect our seminary graduates to develop in their parish work the kind of theological integration that they find lacking in their education. Their work as counselors will be done independently of their work as scholars, and the great doctrines of the Church that make up the content of the message of renewal and hope to mankind will somehow seem to be irrelevant to the very men entrusted with the responsibility to preach and teach this gospel.

5) The minister should hold in respect his school, his teachers, and the great authorities of the faith, but he should never accept a theological position simply because an authority holds it.

It is odd that even in the free churches of America there has grown up a respect for certain authorities as if they could never err. This in a sense is due to the cult of personality that plagues the church as it does the rest of American society today.

And yet we believe that a man who is a competent, scholarly minister, a theologian of the pulpit and parish, must be open to new ideas and suggestions, no



"Think, Glutzmire, think! You must have picked it up some place!"

matter what the source. He must be willing to criticize and question his teachers even as he sits in their classes, and he must continue in that critical capacity throughout his ministry.

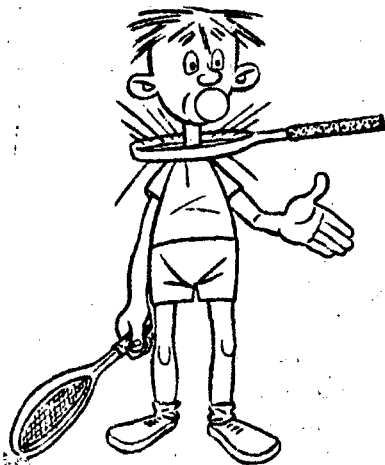
Too long in American theological circles we have fostered conformity by our narrow interests in certain circles. Fortunately this is changing rapidly in our generation as the seminary faculties have opened their ranks to those of many denominations and viewpoints, but our graduates have not yet caught this ecumenical spirit of scholarship, and they need to have it in order to grow in wisdom and understanding.

I am convinced that we in the seminaries have too long been critical of our churches and our ministers because of the way in which the churches have become institutionalized and the pastors organized. We need to ask ourselves whether we have done anything to prepare men for the kind of ministry we think is authentic, and whether we have given them the kind of education that will help them to withstand the temptations of the organizational church. I think the answer must clearly be in the negative. We have neither helped men to comprehend what the modern American ministry is really going to be like--and I doubt that any intern program has really helped them to understand it before they had to assume full responsibility--nor have we given them the kind of education that will empower them to be the ministers they envisaged when they chose the vocation of the ministry.

I shall risk sounding like an expert from outer space, who knows all the answers, and suggest some ways in which we can improve the teaching of theology in our seminaries.

1) Most important, I believe, is the limitation we impose upon ourselves to teach theology rather than peripheral courses. This means that a basic course in doctrine should deal with the classical materials, that a course in the philosophy of religion should deal with philosophers and not with novelists and playwrights. If we are to educate men to the kind of ministry we have been

discussing, we should use whatever time is ours in the teaching of solid material, under the most rigorous discipline, so our ministers will be theologians first and only secondarily critics of contemporary culture.



2) I believe also, as I have indicated, that we must develop habits of investigation and inquiry and integration of knowledge while the students are still under our direction.

3) Finally, I am persuaded that until the seminary faculties begin to integrate their total work more seriously than they have done in the past, the average student will see little connection between the work he does in one subject with that of another.

When I think of the successful pastors I know--and there are many who come immediately to mind--men who are doing the significant work in the church, I think of men who have continued their studies since the day they graduated from seminary. They read extensively and intensively, and so do members of their congregations. They are alert to their world, and they have the respect of their communities because they speak with the authority that only wisdom can bring. I think that they can show us what it means to be a true minister of the Gospel, and they can serve as models as we seek to shape our teaching to the needs of the modern church.

THE MIRACLES and DEMYTHOLOGIZING

It has always been of interest to me to note the negative reaction of some men to the miraculous element in Scripture. It appears that every generation has those who cannot accept the New Testament portrayal of the historical Jesus. For example, our scientifically-oriented culture seems to make it difficult even for Christian leaders to accept the miracles of Jesus as literal truth. The most popular explanation for their presence in the Gospel records is that they were added later by the early church in an over-zealous effort to exalt Jesus.

I would address some questions to those who find the miracle passages undigestible. Is it necessary that we understand all the ways God chooses to work? We forget that if Jesus Christ was God incarnate, miracles are not only acceptable, but natural for him. What would the Gospel writers stand to gain by recording these "exaggerations"? What worthy end would justify this devious means? Apparently these men were willing to die for their deceitfulness--a psychological anomaly more difficult to accept than the miracles. Is it possible that those who emphasized love, honesty, and integrity would so blatantly endeavor to make fiction appear as fact? And would these writers have then added: "And greater things than these shall you do," unless Jesus has said this, and they had known this power to exist in Him, and later, at certain times, within themselves?

For whose benefit was it necessary to add the miracle narratives? Did this make the difference between the belief and non-belief in the early church? The power of God was changing lives in the early church, miracles or not. Who, then, would stand to gain from this? The best rationale for the miracles is that they were an integral part of the historical reality of Jesus, as He was known, accepted, and portrayed by the early church.

The Scriptures tell us that spiritual discernment is needed in order to understand the import of the Gospel. It will always be true that the foolishness of God is greater than the wisdom of men. It is difficult for me to understand why acceptance of the miracles at face value is a problem for a person committed to Jesus Christ. For the Christian has the testimony within himself, having experienced the greatest of all miracles--he has become a new creation.

- Marilyn Kirk -

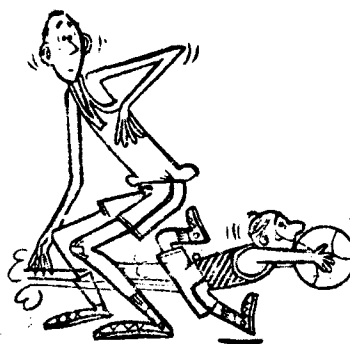
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THE LAST TIME OUT . . .

One day, while everyone
Was sitting around doing
nothing,
Christ came in.
Everybody said, "No,
Man, not again. We're
Really not up to it.
Why don't you go someplace
else?"
He looked at them and showed
Them the nail marks on His
hands
And feet, and they said,
"Man, that's real touching. Now
Go someplace else."
He showed them
His side where the
Spear had been, and the
scratches
On His forehead where the
Thorns were, and they
Said, "Sad, Man, real sad. Just
Go. . .someplace else."
Only He wouldn't go,
So they crucified Him again
And He just hung there.
They laughed and knew
He was faking, because
This time He didn't
Say, "Father, forgive them..."

--William W. Savage, Jr.
in Motive Magazine
January, 1962

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LET US MEET OUR COMMITMENT

Within the previous structure of the Society of Inquiry, it was decided that the Benevolent Budget for the academic year 1963-64 be directed to the "Committee For Racial Justice Now." A statement was issued to each student concerning this matter. Moreover, the Executive Coordinator of the Committee, Mr. S. Garry Oniki, was informed of the designation of the Benevolent Budget.

Now it seems that the Society has decided to forget its commitment and it has selected a new recipient of its Benevolent Budget.

I think it should be clearly stated that through such action we have failed to meet our commitment to the "Committee For Racial Justice Now." Does this indicate that our involvement in the struggle for racial justice is weakening? Or does this indicate the fact that we are not concerned about the Benevolent Budget--forgetting commitments and accepting contradictory proposals?

It would behoove us to consider the question of benevolent giving. If then we should decide to have a Benevolent Budget, we should be sincere and faithful in our commitments. It is also imperative that we reconsider our commitment to the "Committee For Racial Justice Now."

Harry G. Royer,

Previous Chairman of
Finance Commission

"I do not want to serve thee, Lord, but
if I must,
Please let it be in some less consuming
way.

Why is it that a God must choose to tie
His people to him with the strongest
means

He has created? If I am thy child,
Remove from me this burden of thy love
And let me serve thee in a lesser way.
Oh, now I understand why Israel could
choose

To be thy servant rather than thy son !
I am too cowardly to be thy child--
Let me, like Israel, serve thee under Law
and find thy love therein. Tis too close
For me to stand; thou knowest me too well
And I can see myself for what I am
Reflected with a damning clarity
Against the measure of thy first-born
Son.

Release me, Lord, and let me worship thee
A little farther off, and keep my pride."

The Christian Faith and Youth Today
ed. by Malcolm Strachan and Alvord
Beardsley, pp. 16-17

CORRECTION

We regret that we omitted
the name of David Johnston
from the article on "The
Christian Farmer and His
Government" in the last issue

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Our confidence in Christ does not make
us lazy, negligent or careless, but on
the contrary it awakens us, urges us
on, and makes us active in living right-
eous lives, and doing good. There is no
self-confidence to compare with this.

--Ulrich Zwingli

Feelings come and feelings go,
And feelings are deceiving;
My warrant is the Word of God,
Naught else is worth believing.
Though all my heart should feel condemned
For want of some sweet token,
There is One greater than my heart
Whose Word cannot be broken,
I'll trust in God's unchanging Word
Till soul and body sever;
For though all things shall pass away,
His Word shall stand forever!

--Martin Luther

The world, I thought, belonged to me
Goods, gold, and people, land and sea
Where'er I walked beneath God's sky,
In those old days, my word was "I".

Years passed; there flashed my path-
way near
The fragment of a vision dear;
My former word no more sufficed,
And what I said was--"I and Christ."

But, O, the more I looked on Him
His glory grew, while mine grew dim;
I shrank so small, He towered
so high,
All I dared say was--"Christ and I."

Years more the vision held its place
And looked me steadily in the face;
I speak now in a humbler tone,
And what I say is--"Christ alone."

--Selected
