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Envisioning Theological Education for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada¹

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What direction is theological education going to take in the future? One hopes that it will not progress far down the path described in the 1993 novel, *Gospel*, by Wilton Barnhardt. In this novel, Dr. O’Hanrahan, who is the prophetic anti-hero and biblical scholar at the University of Chicago, comments: “Where once ruled Bach and Mozart and Beethoven, is now this. That’s what saddens me about American Christianity. The lack of learning in the ministers, the clichéd sermons, the backward politics, the shoddiness of the churches, the vapid emptiness of the music...for our country’s Christians, art and architecture and scholarship and music are the enemy camp.”²

I fervently hope that this disparaging view is not to be the fate of theological education in the years ahead, for it is definitely not an encouraging vision! Nevertheless, this image is a vivid wake-up call, compelling the churches and their seminaries and schools to examine the shape and the future of theological education. It prompts some crucial questions that need to be asked by Lutherans: Where is theological education going in my national church body, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada? What is the focus of theological education in ecumenical and global circles today? What does the relationship between academic competence and spiritual and pastoral formation need to look like in theological education? What does it need to be?

Those are difficult – but vital – questions that need to be addressed in the next few years. While one could hope for a vision for theological education for the next generation, it is important to limit the time span of any vision, in order to keep it grounded in reality. The various five year plans proposed in history have all tended to become hopelessly outdated long before their goals are reached. It is akin to looking at the annual prophetic edition of *Popular Mechanics*

that gives predictions of what the technological future will be like. While fantastic and imaginative, all too often these forecasts and prophecies of the future are simply gamely imposed projections of idealistic and unsupported visions and hopes. They are obtainable only if the realistic continuations of present possibilities combined with the realized boundaries imposed by technology, morality, ethics, economics, and culture are pushed aside, or piled on the garbage heap of the forgotten. What the church might want to look for instead – assuming the church wants to pursue theological education at all! – is a theological education that encompasses at least seven crucial factors and identifiers for education in the coming years.

1. Theological education is primarily the responsibility of the church.

I entered graduate school eighteen years ago. I had already served in the parish for four years, and the parish context shaped and formed my understanding of the purpose and role of theological education. I quickly realized, however, that I was approaching theological education from quite a different perspective than many of my classmates. Many of our courses were seminars, which meant presentations by students and an abundance of time for discussion. After many presentations I would ask, “So what does this mean for the church? What does it mean for society?” It seemed a central question to me. Yet to my surprise, many times the answer was a flippant, “Who cares? Theology is not for the church, it’s for the academy.” I would reply, “If we are not doing theology for the church, why bother?”

It is not enough for theological education to be a personal “faith seeking understanding” *“fides quaerens intellectum.”*³ When Anselm first penned that phrase, he was not thinking of the theological endeavour in personal terms, but rather, as a task or journey of faith involving the whole church, seeking understanding together. Today, however, theological education is too often limited to satisfying one’s own personal understanding. Theological education must be a “faith seeking understanding for sake of the church and for the world.” The scholar may be gratified in the search, but self-gratification is not the end or goal of theological education.

The vision and focus for theological education cannot be shaped and crafted in isolation from the church and the world. It is the task

of the church, and it is for the church called to live as the people of God in the world. Theological education must ask the question that Luther constantly asked in his Small Catechism: “What does this mean?” or more accurately, “What is this?”⁴ What is this for the parish, the congregation, the synod? What is this for our world, globally?

Theological education is for the church and the world, and it is primarily the responsibility of the church. One of the ways that this has been carried on through the church’s history has can be summarized in what has traditionally been called “the teaching office” of the bishops. The patristic schools, such as the one in Alexandria, were accountable to the bishops. This accountability for teaching newly evangelized converts developed in Europe around a thousand years ago when bishops appointed “theologians in residence” for each of their cathedrals. This eventually led to the formation of theological schools attached to the cathedrals, schools which became known as universities. Today, our Canadian seminaries are located on university campuses, reminding us that these institutions have come about because of the teaching office of the bishops who took responsibility for the theological education in their own regions.

To be the church in the Lutheran tradition, for the sake of the world, the whole ELCIC needs to learn how to be theologians of the cross. This is not an easy task. Thus, more than ever, the church needs people who, through study and praxis; theologian-pastors can walk with, and engage people who are walking the pilgrim journey. That is what theological education should be about: the journey and process of learning to be theologians of the cross for the sake of the church and the world. When that is forgotten, the church and its seminaries, no matter how stellar or respected they might be, have ceased learning what it means to be the church for others.

There are many obstacles to this task of learning to become theologians of the cross for the sake of the church and the world. Financial restraints are one of the biggest obstacles. With rising costs involved in providing educational services, many denominations are drastically reducing their funding to their seminaries. The real issue, for the church, therefore, is not about how theological education should be delivered – distance education, intensives, internet courses, or the more traditional residential model. The real issue is whether

seminaries will still exist in ten years to provide theological education...and if churches will be able to train its diaconal, pastoral and academic leadership at seminaries owned by their denomination. If churches do not consciously re-affirm their responsibility for theological education, most denominationally affiliated seminaries in Canada will not be able to survive as stand-alone, quasi-independent institutions. If only the seminaries themselves see serious, in-depth theological education as important, then, apart from a great groundswell of wealthy patrons, they will not survive. A quick glance at the changing landscape of theological institutions and seminaries in the prairies bring home this fact all too clearly. Too many seminaries are being severed from their church denominations, most often for the sake of “financial realities.”

It is important at this point to add a caveat, however: While theological education is primarily the responsibility of the church, and for the sake of church and society, this does not mean that the institutions of theological education are simply promoters of the church’s dogma. A theology of the cross does not allow that to be a part of the program. Moreover, there is a certain prophetic role that seminaries and the leaders of the church need to uphold. In a sense, the prophetic role is found in the very nature of theological inquiry. There is a certain responsibility for theological educators and inquirers to ask those questions that otherwise might be silenced or ignored. This responsibility has often been given the title of “academic freedom.” This right, or need, to ask those tough questions may mean challenging the church. Academic freedom, this responsibility to ask tough and perhaps even unpopular questions of the church and of society, is essential for the seminaries to be a rich resource for the church in the world.

Theologians are called to be amongst the apologists for the church, not in the way that this word is understood today, as apologizing for all the things that church has boldly entered or inadvertently stumbled into (although that would not necessarily be a bad thing to do!). Rather, the theological institutions and its theologians, together with the church, are to take the biblical and historical faith seriously. That involves examining and exploring the weaknesses and strengths of what the church proclaims today. It means not only *professing* the faith, in the sense of outlining and restating the central doctrines of the church as neutral observers, but

confessing the faith – standing with, and entering into honest and open dialogue with that tradition that has been passed down to each generation.⁵ It is to enter into dialogue with society and the world, as theologian-pastors, about all the things of life, rather than hide behind a false sanctimony of pseudo-piety or gnostic-knowledge.

2. This confession of the faith, which is at the core of theological education, often takes place in the midst of chaos.

In the times of crises or chaos, the church has responded in with emphases on various aspects of theological education. In the eighth to tenth centuries, the lack of understanding among those who had been baptised, because the village leader had been “converted and baptized,” required that the church develop a *structure* for theological education that would deliver, as St. Paul described it, “as of first importance what I in turn had received” (1 Cor. 15:3). Thus, the “cathedral schools,” as already mentioned, were established. These schools developed into the universities. Then, in the chaos of the reformation era, the lack of understanding of the faith amongst the common people, as described by Luther in the prefaces to the Large and Small Catechisms,⁶ required a new curriculum for theological education that would complement the structured schools already in place for training theologians. Thus, the Small and Large Catechisms were developed for both *laity* and *clergy* as ways so as to provide a broad-based and easily accessible approach to theological instruction. But note: Luther did not do away with the academic training of pastors, nor downplay the importance of training for laity. In fact, the whole point of the catechisms and renewed theological studies at university was to increase theological education – to “raise the bar” rather than lower the bar in their “times of emergency and chaos.”⁷ He continued to teach in the academic setting and in the parish setting. Both were needed.

This fact cannot be forgotten today, in the midst of the chaos and clamour for a new, or easier, less rigorous structure or curriculum for theological education. In fact, perhaps the church needs to enhance and strengthen both forms of theological education – academic and parish – rather than make it less demanding. In the short term, we may attract more students and solve the immediate pastoral shortages in the church by maintaining a less rigorous

seminary program, but in the long run it will not be beneficial for the church. With the chaos resulting from an ever-shrinking biblical and theological literacy in society, the demand for solidly based and deeply rooted theological education is needed more than ever.

Theological education in the future also needs to model ways that the church and its disciples can move through the chaos of tough, controversial issues. Careful reflection and discussion are required, which can be facilitated by team teaching. When done well, it's an effective model for constructive dialogue in parishes and churches in a multi-cultural society: it encompasses diversity while permitting its participants to seek consensus on essentials. The church needs practice at discussing theology as a community of theologians, scholars, and all the faithful, as it is confronted with a range of issues, issues that will not go away even though the church may prefer to ignore them. The church must not abandon its responsibility, however demanding that responsibility may be.

The church can also move more sure-footedly through the chaos by drawing on the tradition in theological education that *unity in the essentials* is not the same as *uniformity*. Richness of music, for example, happens, not when everyone sings the same note in unison, but rather, when many notes are sung, even in apparent dissonance. Such richness enhances the quality of decisions that must be made.

Theological education is at a crossroads. Many are wondering what to do, how to proceed. On the one hand theological educators here a cry for an ever more controlled, narrow, and inflexible dogmatism, which is so appealing to a society seeking security. Many would like the church to be more autocratic and authoritarian ... as long as its leadership emphasizes *their* agenda. Here theological education is expected to train people to give unflinching allegiance to this stream of the tradition, and not to deviate.

On the other hand, there is the more difficult – but more hopeful – confessional approach, which does not rush into answering questions before they were asked. The confessional approach, for Lutherans, involves vulnerability, a willingness to explore, to listen, to reason together out of conviction but not oppression, to clearly keep in mind what is of the essence (*esse*) of the church, what is helpful for its well-being (its *bene esse*), and what is adiaphoron.⁸ If the church dares to embark upon a journey into the future with a confessional approach, one which models for the church a committed

dialogue as to what is of the essence for salvation, what is helpful for its well-being, and what is *adiaphora*, then the seminaries can be a valuable resource in that journey.

3. Theological education, as primarily the responsibility of the church, is always going to be a “work in progress.”

All that a person needs to learn cannot be learned in the three or four year program of theological education that takes place in a seminary setting. Rosemary Skinner Keller has noted that “vocation is a lifelong process, a journey that begins in childhood and continues until death.”⁹ Luther understood this as well. In the *Table Talks*, he said,

To be sure, the saints understood the Word of God and could also speak about it, but their practice did not keep pace with it. Here one forever remains a learner.... Though I am a great doctor, I haven't yet progressed beyond the instruction of children in the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. I still learn and pray these every day with my Hans and my little Lena. Who understands in all of its ramifications even the opening words, “Our Father who art in heaven”?¹⁰

If theological education is a long term goal for the church, this commitment will affect the way education is carried out in seminaries. Seminaries need to deliberately foster this long-term view of theological education. It really is very similar to my approach in coaching hockey. My goal was to create a life-long love for playing hockey – fostering an attitude, rather than simply teaching enough technical skills to have a winning season for that year. The long-term goal was to have every one of those seven or eight year old children who were eagerly and expectantly looking up to me, to be as excited about playing hockey at the age of forty or even sixty as they were as children. Learning is a way of life, not a series of facts to be learned.

For theological education to be relevant to the life of the church, bishops, pastors, professors and staff need to continue to emphasize, and participate in, life-long learning. God created a richness of grace that finds its way into life in so many ways that it cannot be exhausted and fully comprehended in a couple of years of education. Thus, people are always learning – always discovering, delighting and marvelling in all the wisdom and gifts of the richness and the resources of the church and academia. To be life-long learners, teachers and students need to take the time to learn things in depth,

and ongoing encouragement given for this in-depth learning throughout the church. In order to survive – and even more, to thrive – theological education should be viewed as an attitude for life, rather than a four year sentence to get out of the way as quickly and painlessly as possible.

4. Theological education needs, in the future, to be even more disciplined, passionate, informed, and open to the questions of the churches and society.

In order to be true to itself, theological education needs to be involved with ever new questions and possibilities, while at the same time being rooted in the richness of scripture and tradition and the scholarship that accompanies them. This has always been the pattern in the life of the church. More than ever, change is becoming an increasingly important factor in society. Cardinal Newman noted it well: “in heaven it is otherwise, but here below, to live is to change, and to live well, is to have changed often.”¹¹ However, as McCarthy states, this change does not mean a

“wholesale departure from the substance of the Christian deposit of faith, but rather a willingness to plumb its depths, to perceive new lines of development that tap into the vibrant power of faith and action. Theological reflection, then, is a critical task, a task at once holding fast to the accrued wisdom of the church, but is also willing to risk the promise of an encounter with the ‘stranger’ who may come in the guise of diverse races, cultures, and genders, and intellectual traditions.”¹²

If that kind of willingness to “plumb the depths” was critical in the nineteenth century, it is even more important now. Newman reminds the church of the importance of the diversity of voices in theological education.

The ELCIC has to come to terms with this diversity, sooner rather than later. This diversity, however, is best seen as an opportunity rather than a threat. Clergy and laity from diverse ethnic and cultural groups add richness to the church, giving a sense of the extravagant sumptuousness of God’s creation. The church and its theological schools are only beginning to learn how important it is to have people from various races, cultures, and both genders on the faculty and in the student body. Each brings different perspectives and piercing questions that we have often not even been aware of in isolated

communities of displaced Germans and Scandinavians. Theological education needs this diversity to equip itself for ministry in our increasingly diverse communities, and to more truly reflect the “mind of God” in our world. The seminaries need to be deliberate in fostering this diversity. Cross-cultural experiences are not luxuries, but essentials for understanding something of the context of Canadian society and the Christian faith. This is the growing edge for seminaries and the church. The church is only beginning to recognize the importance of Chinese ministries and ministries to aboriginals. In the same way, world religion courses are no longer needed just for those considering missionary work; it is an essential component of neighbourhood ministry.

Moreover, in this ever more complex world, it is not enough for theological education to provide simple how-to manuals that only touch upon the basic survival tools in the parish. This model for theological education is increasingly inadequate. “How-to” manuals work only as long as the problems that arise in a parish, church, or society, are exactly the same as the case studies present in the training manual. But what if the situations and factors are different? “How-to” training may work in stable parishes where nothing new or unexpected arises, but they do not always work, and such congregations are increasingly rare. Thus, theological education needs, more than ever, to teach one how to *think* theologically. That requires discipline, passion, scholarship and personal and pastoral formation rooted in the community. Ideally, seminaries need the time to provide more than the minimum guidelines and training for theological education. What is presently provided is not far from the minimum of theological education needed at the moment; it is far from ideal.

Theological education also requires a diversity of theological approaches or models in the next ten years. David Kelsey, in his seminal 1993 work entitled, *Between Athens and Berlin: the Theological Education Debate*, has described the history of theological education as gyrating to one of two models.¹³ Athens reflects the formation model of theological education. It has been described as that insightful knowledge of the Good resulting from a cultivation of the virtues of the soul. Contemplation leading to an intuitive knowing of the Good are integral elements of this model. The whole process focuses on life in community. This approach was modelled by Clement, Origen, and the Cappadocians.

A second model is represented by Berlin, and reflects the founding of Berlin University in the early nineteenth century. In this model of theological education, there is a focus on *Wissenschaft* (orderly, disciplined, and critical research), combined with the image of the pastor as a professional. Friedrich Schleiermacher, one of its founders, felt theological study needed to reclaim its place amidst the study of the professions of law and medicine. Learning the corpus of theological scholarship was the primary and central focus for education.

Berlin represents a theological education of the head, with an emphasis on learning knowledge in the classroom, while Athens represents a theological education of the heart – not as the place of emotion, but the place of the will and of volition, and which takes place in the chapel and community.

Frederick Herzog suggests a third model be added to that of Berlin and Athens, a model that he calls “Lima.” Lima represents a theological education that is experiential, taking place in the midst of poverty and community. This context asks questions and challenges assumptions of real-life issues that are often, and all too easily, put aside in the North American context. But as Herzog says, “In a strange way, our theological schools in the North have often been able to seal themselves off from their mission to all non-persons existing on the margins of our cities and our country.” He continues: “How different this is from Mother Teresa’s approach to theological education. When she was once asked, ‘can we live with you and serve the poor?’ her response was, ‘Allow you to come here and serve the poor I cannot. You can come, but only if you want to see God’.” Reflecting on this, Herzog comments, “What the theologian needs most is to see God. Yet God will not be seen where the divine can be controlled. The poor, as such, do not demonstrate God, and yet they are the place for us to ‘see’ God.”¹⁴ “Lima” is an important counterbalance to the theological education of Berlin and Athens. As Herzog states, “The self-orientation (the *cogito, ergo sum*) of modernity will have to make room for *amor, ergo sumus* (I am being loved, therefore we are).”¹⁵

Berlin, therefore, represents theological learning from the sources and literature; Athens reflects the theology learned by exploring people in relationship, and Lima proposes a theological education obtained in the experiential and the communal, where God encounters people in those contexts beyond their control and outside

their comfort zones. It is essential that theological education today take place in all three cities: in the classroom, the chapel, and the community. Such a balanced theological education calls forth an engagement of the mind, heart, hands and eyes. It is scholarly, formative, and connected in the realities of life. It is globally and locally aware. Such education, however, needs to be done with great integrity. It will be crucial that the church and its seminaries address the multi-faceted issues that this global view places before us. Thus, World Religions courses and cross-cultural and global experiences are core aspects of theological education today. Both global voices and local voices need to be heard, lived, and reflected upon. This involves, among other things, addressing the multi-faith and multi-cultural context that is Canada. The church cannot hide in its middle-class neighbourhoods. Theological education must include Lima and Bay Street, inner city, suburbia, and rural Canada, European, Asian and African voices, and the voices of men and women. This education will lack credibility if the voices of the First Nations people of Canada are not heard. If theological questions identified and raised in these contexts are ignored, or cannot be answered in ways that speak truth to head, heart, and hands to each of these people in our increasingly global community, the church will make itself irrelevant. Moreover, the church will have forgotten its manners about hospitality. Waddell is right: theological education needs to teach the church, once again, how to become “experts in the virtue of hospitality.”¹⁶

These things take work. Thus, rigorous and even demanding theological education cannot be considered a luxury for the church. Nor is it helpful to reduce the requirements and expectations of theological education. The church today is being asked questions never before asked of the church, about realities never imagined in previous generations. It takes more experience in, and exposure to, Berlin, Athens, and Lima, to equip people to minister in such a diverse world where biblical and theological literacy is quickly becoming a thing of the past.

It is a demanding and risky business, this theological education! Sharon Welch captures it extremely well when she announces at the beginning of a class;

It is crucial to know that ... this class is not a safe space. We are discussing volatile issues and there will be areas of profound

disagreement. We enter this discussion as individuals and as groups with radically different histories and experiences. There are power differentials between us.... In trying to learn from each other, to learn how to work together, it is essential that we acknowledge that this is painful, difficult, and possibly exhilarating work. We do not know if we can trust each other.... we are *likely* to offend, disappoint, and surprise each other, and we will probably be hurt and challenged. We are not, therefore, in a safe space. However, we are in a space for learning, a space in which we may learn how to work with conflict and how to learn from each other.¹⁷

What Welch gives is a descriptive vision of the kind of theological education that is needed. This lived vision will not happen, however, in a model of theological education that has no time or ability to probe the depths of the treasures entrusted to it, or apart from an intentional “cross-formed” community.

5. Theological education, to be effective and relevant in the future, can be guided by Luther’s model for theological education: namely *oratio, meditatio, and tentatio*.

In the 1539 preface to the *Wittenberg Edition of Luther’s German Writings*, Luther describes the method of theological education as *oratio, meditatio, and tentatio*.¹⁸ *Oratio* (prayer) is the crucial process of formation in which one is “conformed” or “formed with” Christ. It is about “knowing” God – or more accurately, being known by God. What makes *oratio* important is not how much a person “puts into it,” as if one’s efforts make all the difference. Rather, it is the faithfulness of God that is important in prayer. Luther noted that “no one obtains anything from God by his own virtue or the worthiness of his prayer, but solely by reason of the boundless mercy of God, who by anticipating all our prayers and desires, induces us through his gracious promise and assurance to petition and to ask so that we might learn how much more he provides for us and how he is more willing to give than we to take or to seek [Eph. 3:20]”¹⁹ In the same treatise he notes, “We pray after all because we are unworthy to pray. The very fact that we are unworthy and that we dare to pray confidently, trusting only in the faithfulness of God, makes us worthy to pray and to have our prayer answered.”²⁰ Prayer involves “lifting up of the heart or mind to God,”²¹ but there it is shaped and formed by God into what God wills for the person, the church and the world,

rather than using prayer as an attempt to manipulate God for one's own ends. This kind of prayer that conforms its practitioners into Christ is definitely something that would be helpful to learn and develop in the whole church.

Second, Luther called for *meditation* (meditation). While what he had in mind encompasses the practice of meditation as understood today, the formation of one's heart and mind includes much more. For Luther this meant encountering God's hidden and revealed presence in the world in ways of God's choosing, rather than speculation upon a God in the heavens. Speculation was not of much use, according to Luther. With his usual bluntness, he described the fallacies of such an approach:

...when a monk in the monastery is sitting in deepest contemplation, excluding the world from his heart altogether, and thinking about the Lord God the way he himself paints and imagines Him, he is actually sitting – if you will pardon the expression – in the dung, not up to his knees but up to his ears. For he is proceeding on his own ideas without the Word of God; and that is sheer deception and delusion, as Scripture testifies everywhere.²²

Thus Luther proposed that the practice of *meditatio* include reading, studying the oral speech and literal words of the books. It involves reading and re-reading works with diligent attention to detail. It includes preaching, reading and hearing, studying and speaking. It cannot be done in isolation, but only in a community of laity, theologians and pastors.

Third, theological education is to call the church and its training of leadership to faithfulness in the midst of *tentatio*, or *Anfechtung*: struggling with the realities and the temptations that come with the living of life. As Luther said, "This is the touchstone which teaches you not only to know and understand, but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's Word is, wisdom beyond all wisdom."²³ Elsewhere, he states, "Christ's passion must be met not with words or forms, but with life and truth."²⁴

The seminaries of the church require a healthy dose of Athens, Berlin and Lima; of *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *tentatio*. The classical study of history, the Bible, systematic theology, liturgical studies, and the pastoral care of the soul, rooted in prayer, meditation and *anfechtung* need to be balanced with formative courses having a community focus and cross-cultural and globalization components.

6. Theological education needs to follow the ‘thin way’ of the theology of the cross.

It is increasingly difficult to follow this “thin tradition” when the future of theological education and even the church is either in doubt or under careful observation by its critics. It is increasingly tempting to jump on the bandwagon of “visioning for success” in theological education, by offering glittery programs for students and the church that will train people to be charismatic, enthusiastic and popular. It is always tempting to make financial security, blossoming endowment funds, and increased student enrolments as the measure of success.

A theological education based on this Lutheran distinctive of a theology of the cross will be one that is centred on the gospel rather than success. Theological education cannot, nor should it, remove the stumbling block of the gospel. The goal of theological education in seminaries is not to learn how to make the gospel acceptable and palatable, as if the gospel is something that can be marketed and sold like a lucky charm.

Theological education rooted in a theology of the cross involves theologians of the cross calling people to live the “way of the cross.” This is central to the understanding of the gospel, which the church is committed to proclaim through Word and Sacrament. Theological education dare not “water down” this gospel, nor modify it into something that people will find more appealing.

Early in his life as pastor and theological scholar, Luther declared “The cross tests everything.”²⁵ The theology of the cross should also test the content and methodology of theological education. Theological education needs to stop and ask of itself, “Is it Christ’s gospel, or our gospel? Which gospel is the church going to proclaim in the twenty-first century? A gospel made palatable to the world, or the gospel of Jesus Christ, and him crucified?” This gospel, rooted in the theology of the cross, is simplicity itself. At the same time, it is never reducible to a formula or pithy saying. It is learned in a moment, but it also takes a lifetime to learn how to proclaim this gospel accurately and faithfully in our ever changing context. The task requires more than head knowledge. It takes more than sincerity of the heart. It takes more than identification with the poor or the marginalized in society.

Thus, the most basic goal of theological education in Lutheranism is to teach people to be theologians of the cross.

Theological education cannot turn out spectator theologians, who will observe from the sidelines or the bleachers.

The church is increasingly tempted by theologies of glory. They are the perennial lure, even in theological education. Paul Wadell gives a description of one example rampant in the classroom:

Everybody follows some gospel and today's college students have been baptised into the gospel of consumerism; it is the cultural mood they bring with them into the classroom like the backpacks on their backs. For many of my students, television is their meditation chapel, shopping malls their temples, and food courts their place for eucharist. Evangelized through the catechesis of consumerism, they have learned it is not seeking and loving and glorifying God that makes us human, but marketing, producing, buying, purchasing, and consuming. Like any gospel, consumerism has provided them with answers to the most pressing questions of life: What does it mean to be human? What should I do with the life I have been given? Where will I find happiness and hope? Answers are shouted back every time they flick on the television, open a magazine, or stroll through a mall: Who you are is what you own and the more you own the more you are.²⁶

These are the realities of theologies of glory that the church needs to address, but doing so will require courage: "courage is not a matter of denying or minimizing the obstacles and challenges we face, especially if we envision teaching as a vocation and a ministry; rather, the power of courage rests precisely in its realism and its hope."²⁷ Discerning the theologies of glory requires the church and its seminaries to identify and name the gods of society and the theologies of success that are operating unchecked, and to speak about this reality in ways that help church and society to reorganize their priorities. This is a vital component of the task of theological education today.

7. Theological education needs to recognize the trend in society towards cocooning.

The move towards cocooning, the withdrawing from society and involvement in the community, may be a reaction to globalization and the fear of the rapidly changing future. Cocooning is a way to retreat from threat, perceived or real. It gives a sense of security. One of its symbols is the gated community. While attempting to provide security for those who have this luxury, its self-centred focus tears the fabric of society apart.

One of the first victims of cocooning is the loss of a deliberate inclusion of all people. It shows itself in the church when congregations retreat into themselves and benevolence money is reduced. In society, there is less money available for charities. The amount that “first world” nations give to “third world” nations continues to drop. For both church and society, it has led to more difficulty in recruiting volunteers. People feel pulled apart by competing demands and expectations; the natural reaction is to withdraw, to cocoon. Here’s the challenge for theological education: the pastor is pressured to become the chaplain for the “withdrawing ones,” rather than a prophet to open the church to the world where God dwells and where God beckons.

In an article provocatively entitled “The Maceration of a Minister” Joseph Sittler reflects upon the general tearing apart of society and its public figures in our world, noticed that the pastor would be caught in the middle. He called it the “brutal chopping into small pieces of the minister’s focus, time, vision, sense of vocation, and contemplative acreage.” He argued that, “parish busyness was often contrary to the genuine vocation of Christian ministry, of preserving the congregation’s soul.”²⁸ It is hard to preserve the congregation’s soul when the congregation has gone into full cocoon mode and is no longer interested in engaging the world – and thus, engaging itself in the very place it is called to be.

Theological education has the responsibility of teaching people how to proclaim the gospel in Word and Sacrament in a way that draws people out of their cocoons and brings them back into community. Thus they pass on the richness of the tradition with accountability for the future. In times past, this was the legacy of the monastic movement. Monasteries were meant to engage the world of the present with the resources and richness of the past and the potential for the future. The goal was not isolation from society, but a focussed use of gifts of the monastic order for the sake of the broader community. It was this monastic movement that was the most potent force of mission in the church in the first 1500 years of its life, spreading the Good News of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The early missionaries such as Boniface, Ansgar, Hilde, Mechtilde, Columba, and Patrick, to name a few, were members of monastic orders. The contributions the Iona community made to the evangelisation of Europe cannot be forgotten. This missional aspect

of the monastic movement is crucial in theological education today for the church.

The seminaries that survive in the future will have to have a strong focus on community formation. This community will model alternative ways to bring students, church, and faculty into community for sustained and transformative formation. As Lois Malcolm states:

I would argue that there remains a place for the seminary as “abbey” – a place for retreat from the rest of life’s complexity for concentrated study and prayer in community. And there remains a place for the kind of intellectual rigour the “academic” phase of seminary has required. But the way these dimensions of seminary education will be woven into the overall pattern of “educating leaders for Christian communities” will vary greatly in this century. What is not up for grabs is the task – that of discerning how God is at work *in, with, and under* the reality of our lives, discerning when it is Christ who is preached (whether by friend or a foe, or by an insider or an outsider to the Christian community), discerning when and how God’s goodness is being replaced by some blasphemous effort to be God (whether by the power of an individual or the systems that individual is participating in), discerning when and how to enact God’s justice and mercy in the often messy complexity of life.²⁹

Part of the attraction of cocooning in our society is that it holds out the possibility of a slower, more manageable and healthier lifestyle. But there are other ways to deal with this desire to gain some control over our lives in an incredibly hectic paced world. Paul recognized this when he called for the church to have clear vocational tasks, which allow people the time and the resources to use their gifts in the best way, for the sake of church and society. This also applies to the organizational and administrative policies in theological education. To paraphrase Paul, “Let the teachers teach, the administrators administer, the students learn, the staff make the facilities and programs functional, the board members govern, the bishops provide oversight, and the synods and all the people together seek life-long learning while providing nurture and support.”

In a world where more and more is downloaded onto fewer and fewer people, where multi-tasking is required to survive in a position, when people are drawn in to ever-tightening and more demanding circles to survive, it is all too convenient to blindly follow the ways

of corporate society. It is all too easy to download more work onto fewer and fewer people. But when this is done, is not the church and its seminaries, in effect, tightening the noose around its own neck?

The church is already short of pastors. Yet how can the church, with any integrity, encourage people who sense a call to ordained ministry, to become pastors and proclaimers of the wholeness of life found in the gospel, when it is modelling something very different? The expectations held by the pastors and leaders in the church are great; surely, more needs to be done. But the solution that seems most popular in the immediate future of theological education is to provide more “convenient” theological education, combined with distance education that is more time-demanding for the professors, and more elective courses, with ever fewer resources. By doing so, it is supposed that theological education will counteract the results of fewer resources brought on by cocooning. This is, however, one of the most counter-productive trends occurring in theological education. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, in an article entitled, “Contemplation in the Midst of Chaos,” suggests a different approach: “Reducing the amount of work expected of students and professors alike might have the unexpected consequence of enriching academic life.”³⁰ It would also enrich seminaries, the church, and society. Placing more demands on an already overstretched faculty, staff, bishops, and administration is not a healthy or helpful way to respond to a cocooning society.

Conclusion

Theological education needs to be seen as an endeavour of the whole church, done in cooperation with the seminaries, rather than turning it into a competition between seminary and church, a competition between “us” and “them.” Such divisive images are not helpful. A new image of this relationship is needed. Why not propose a new image, where the natural answer to the question of “Who is on the staff in your congregation?” would be, “All the baptized, the local pastor and staff, the deans, bishops and staff of the synods and national church, the leadership and staff of the Lutheran World Federation, and the staff and faculty of its seminaries.” The whole church is a part of the “staff” of the local congregation. This again is a reminder that theological education is primarily the responsibility of the whole church.

The key ingredients needed for a viable theological education for the beginning of the twenty-first century are not much different than those necessary for the future of the whole church. What is required is an ongoing commitment to discernment, learning, worship, walking with others, sharing freely of its resources, communicating clearly, and responding faithfully, flexibly and creatively to the needs of the neighbour. These are the things that are at the heart of what it means to be the church in this time and place, and what theological education must be in order to prepare its leaders. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada summed up these directions in the seven commitments of the *Evangelical Declaration* of 1997.³¹

The church has a challenge before it in theological education. This challenge can be identified with two simple questions: “Will the church be committed to theological education in the future? If so, what shape will it take?” Those two questions are not easily answered. The church cannot answer these questions apart from its seminaries, and the seminaries cannot answer these questions apart from the church. Moreover, these questions need to be answered locally and globally if theological education is to be credible and worthwhile for the seminaries, the church, and society itself.

Notes

- 1 It is an honour to contribute this article as a part of the Festschrift for Dr. Faith Rohrbough. I have had the privilege of co-teaching a course on the History of the Lutheran Church in Canada with her until her retirement. Her experience and expertise in theological education has been a gift to the ELCIC. Her involvement in and commitment to higher education is reflected in her long involvement in the *Association of Theological Schools*. As a church historian, she has followed the development of Lutheran seminaries in North America. No doubt, some of these seven factors crucial to theological education for the future have been imparted by Dr. Rohrbough upon myself and countless others who are interested in future of theological education.
- 2 Wilton Barnhardt, *Gospel* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993), p. 743.
- 3 Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion*, translated with an introduction by M.J. Charlesworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 104-5. Later, in the *Proslogion* itself, Anselm declares, “For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand (*Neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam*).” Pp. 114-5.

- 4 Martin Luther, “The Small Catechism,” *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). The German text literally says, “Was ist das?” *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutheranischen Kirche*, Zwölste Auslage (Göttingen: Dandenhoed & Ruprecht, 1998), pp. 507ff.
- 5 This distinction is made by Douglas John Hall in his theological trilogy, *Thinking the Faith, Professing the Faith, and Confessing the Faith* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1989 1993, 1996).
- 6 In the *Small Catechism*, Luther complained, “The deplorable, wretched depravation that I recently encountered while I was a visitor has constrained and compelled me to prepare this catechism...” (SC, Preface, 1). He describes the conditions in more detail to Amsdorf in a letter of November 11, 1528 (*Luther’s Works* 49:213-14). In the *Large Catechism*, Luther criticizes pastors, common folk, and nobility for their lack of understanding of the basics of the Christian faith. See the LC, The Larger Preface, 1-9.
- 7 That it was considered a time of emergency or chaos is reflected in Luther’s concession to appoint princes as “emergency bishops” (*Notbischof*) until that time when things settled down. On the topic of *Notbischof*, see Lewis W. Spitz, “Luther’s Ecclesiology and His Concept of the Prince as ‘Notbischof,’” *Church History* 22 (1953):113-41.
- 8 This groundwork for this distinction is made in the Formula of Concord, Article X, where the adiaphoristic controversy was addressed. This article, in both the Epitome and in the Solid Declaration, needs to be read alongside of Articles IV (justification) and VII of the Augsburg Confession, (Concerning the Church), and the Smalkald Articles, II.i.1-5 (The First and Chief Article). Those things which are essential for the unity of the church cannot be The Gospel alone is of the essence (*esse*) of salvation, other things may be useful for the church (its well being: *bene esse*), but they are still *adiaphora* – things not required. While these distinctions appear simple and clear, the church has always had enormous difficulty discerning to which category the challenging issues belong.
- 9 Rosemary Skinner Keller, “My Vocational Kinship with the United States’ First Female Theologian,” *The Scope of our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher*, L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell, eds., (Grand Rapids: Wm .B. Eerdmans, 2002), p. 84.
- 10 *Luther’s Works*, 54:9 No. 81 (*Table Talks*).
- 11 As noted in, Msgr. Jeremiah J. McCarthy, “Theological Education in a Postmodern Era.” Presentation at the WOCATI General

- Assembly, 2002, 1. Accessed June 6, 2005 at: <<http://www.wocati.org/mccarthy.html>>
- 12 McCarthy, *Theological Education in a Postmodern Era*, p. 1.
- 13 David H. Kelsey, *Between Athens and Berlin: The Theological Education Debate* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993).
- 14 Frederick Herzog, "Athens, Berlin and Lima," *Theology Today*, Volume 51 No. 2 (July 1994):273, 274.
- 15 Herzog, "Athens, Berlin and Lima": 276.
- 16 Paul J. Wadell, "Teaching as a Ministry of Hope," *The Scope of our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher*, L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell, eds., (Grand Rapids: Wm .B. Eerdmans, 2002), p. 131.
- 17 Sharon D. Welch, *Sweet Dreams in America: Making Ethics and Spirituality Work* (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 107.
- 18 *Luther's Works*, 34:285 ("Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writings," 1539).
- 19 *Luther's Works*, 42:87 ("On Rogationtide Prayer and Procession," 1519).
- 20 *Luther's Works*, 42:89 ("On Rogationtide Prayer and Procession," 1519).
- 21 *Luther's Works*, 42:25 ("An Exposition of the Lord's Prayer" 1519).
- 22 *Luther's Works*, 21:33-4 ("The Sermon on the Mount," 1521).
- 23 *Luther's Works*, 34:285-7. ("Preface to the Wittenberg Edition of Luther's German Writings," 1539).
- 24 *Luther's Works*, 42:14 ("A Meditation on Christ's Passion" 1519).
- 25 WA 5:179/31 "Second Psalm Lectures, 1519-1521." Commentary on Psalm 5:12.
- 26 Wadell, "Teaching as a Ministry of Hope," p. 121.
- 27 Wadell, "Teaching as a Ministry of Hope," p. 133.
- 28 Joseph Sittler, "The Maceration of a Minister," in *Christian Century* (June 10, 1959):698-701; 698.
- 29 Lois Malcolm, "Teaching as Cultivating Wisdom for a Complex World," in *The Scope of our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher*, L. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell, eds., (Grand Rapids: Wm .B. Eerdmans, 2002), p. 153.
- 30 Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, "Contemplation in the Midst of Chaos," in *The Scope of our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher*, L.

Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell, eds., (Grand Rapids: Wm .B. Eerdmans, 2002), p. 56.

- ³¹ *The Evangelical Declaration*. This “confessional” document was “embraced” by the ELCIC at its 1997 national convention in 1997, held in Toronto, Ontario. The document itself is found in Appendix 1, *In Christ: Called to Witness. Minutes of the Sixth Biennial Convention, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Toronto, Ontario, July 23-27, 1997* (Winnipeg: ELCIC, 1997), 170-71. Appendix 2 (pp. 172-95) contains a list of recommendations stemming from the *Evangelical Declaration*, including some helpful proposals for theological education (pp. 177-79). The *Evangelical Declaration* can also be accessed at: <<http://www.elcic.ca/docs/evandecl.html>> Accessed June 7, 2005.